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**Surviving the Arab Spring
The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Case Study of Kuwait (2011–2012)**

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**Surviving the Arab Spring:
The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Case Study of Kuwait
(2011–2012)**

*"... Gulf cooperation is a structure created by the will of Gulf peoples. It is a sincere response to the facts of life in this part of the world ... it is our gift to our sons, and sons of Arabism. Our decisions, liabilities, future steps, vision of our hopes, and the test of our will are the trust of our peoples ... "*¹

H.H. Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, November 1984.

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¹ *Al-Diwan Al-Amiri*. (1984). H.H. Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah, Opening Speech, GCC 5th Summit. Kuwait.

I. Abstract

This research analyses the reactions of the Gulf monarchies to the mass demonstrations that took place during the Arab Spring, arguing that the Arab Spring motivated Gulf ruling elites to intensify cooperation efforts under their regional alliance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It hypothesises that the Gulf monarchies utilised the GCC as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring as its members engaged in collaborative efforts in three areas to sustain and prolong their rule: *enhancing regime legitimacy*; *heightening internal security*; and *collaborating in a defence scheme*. The strengthening of Gulf unity through the GCC organisation proved to be a primary and ongoing strategy employed by all six Gulf governments during and after the Arab Spring and, despite the fact that a closer union compromised the sovereignty of the individual monarchies, this was accepted by all six member states. As such, the case study of Kuwait and its government response to the unrest during the Arab Spring presents an analysis of how one member state restructured its domestic policies to allow the regional alliance greater influence over its foreign and domestic affairs in order to preserve its regime and, ultimately, survive the Arab Spring.

II. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and friends for helping me get through this process. A special thanks to my loving parents, Fariha and Nasser, who have been my greatest supporters; my sister, Mona, without whom I would not have survived; my husband, Abdulaziz, who has been my rock; Eva, who has always believed in me; and finally, to my daughter Fay, who has inspired me to reach the finish line.

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Introduction

The Arab Spring represents a challenging period in the contemporary history of the Middle East region, where the relationship between rulers and ruled is challenged and the legitimacy of state institutions is questioned. The seeds of the Arab Spring were planted in the winter of 2010, when a municipal inspector in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid confiscated the vegetable cart of vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, because he did not have a proper vending licence. The young merchant might have needed either a stronger connection to an influential person or enough money for a bribe in order to obtain a licence. It appears that a combination of humiliation and powerlessness drove him to an act of public self-immolation in front of a local government building. In the following days, solidarity rallies sprouted across the country, at which there was violent confrontation between security forces and protestors. The deaths of protestors provoked a series of mass demonstrations against the Tunisian regime of Zine El Abidine ben Ali. Within months, further uprisings occurred in neighbouring Arab countries, and the autocratic leaderships of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya were removed from power.²

Interestingly, the ousting of four Arab dictators stands in contrast to the survival of eight monarchs in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, producing a striking dichotomy between regime structures in the region: the monarchies and the republics.

² Rosiny, S. (2012). The Arab Spring: Triggers, Dynamics and Prospects. *German Institute of Global and Area Studies*, (1).

Thus, despite the widespread demonstrations across the Arab world, the Arab Spring in fact embodies two broad spectrums of relatively different uprisings: one in the republican states that highlighted a deep-rooted anger at economic and political failures by the ruling elites, and having the aim of complete regime change; the other within the monarchies, where a segment of the population also began to demand social, economic and political rights from their ruling monarchs, but without the demand for regime change (Bahrain excepted). The different experiences of the two spectrums are based on the characteristically distinct foundations of political legitimacy, economic opportunities, cultural identities and state capacities offered within each regime type.³ There is, it would appear, a dichotomy – almost a polarity – in the source, scope, and intensity between the two mutually exclusive methods of governance. This research does not intend to explore the structural differences between monarchical and republican regimes, nor does it imply that the resilience of the monarchical regimes is exclusively based on certain monarchical attributes. A prominent scholar specialising in the monarchical exceptionalism of the Gulf monarchies, Gregory Gause, asserts: “Monarchy in and of itself does not dictate a particular path to regime survival”.⁴ Rather, this research argues that the reason behind the survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring is the utilisation of certain tactics by the Gulf ruling elites. It aims to focus on the survival of the six Gulf monarchies that constitute the members of the regional organisation, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) during the Arab Spring.

³ Gray, M. (2013). A Tale of Two Middle East: Change and Stasis in the Arab World. *Griffith Asia Quarterly*, 1(2/3), 51–76.

⁴ Gause, G. (2013). Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East’s Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring. *Brookings Doha Center*. Analysis Paper, 8.

The central question this research addresses in its analysis of the survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring is this: what is the relationship between the Gulf monarchies and their regional organisation, the GCC, and how have the Gulf monarchies utilised the GCC as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring? In addressing this question, the research seeks to provide an analysis of how the Gulf monarchies utilised certain tactics under a broad GCC strategy for regime preservation during the Arab Spring. This strategy consists of three main tactics employed by the monarchies to prevent organised demonstrations and suppress government opposition: enhancing monarchical legitimacy, heightening internal security, and collaborating in a defence scheme. This research also provides an analysis of the emergence of the GCC as a regional organisation and examines the changing internal and external circumstances that dictated the role of the GCC in the domestic affairs of the Gulf monarchies.

The GCC was established on May 25, 1981, by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The GCC officially bound the six Gulf countries into a union of mutual interests in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iran–Iraq war in 1980. The objectives of the GCC include the development of closer relations between member countries in the economic, military, and political spheres. At its inception, scholars and political observers viewed the GCC as an organisation doomed to failure due to its fragility in the face of others' aspirations to regional hegemony (Iran and Iraq). However, the GCC has shown itself to be remarkably robust and is proving to be one of the few cases in the Arab world where regional cooperation is achievable. Indeed, the importance of examining this organisation lies in the rare durability of its members' unity within the region, as well as the eminent value of

its members in the global economic sphere, where the six GCC countries hold more than one third of the world's proven crude oil reserves and 22% of the world's proven natural gas reserves.⁵

This research highlights the importance of the role of the GCC in the Gulf monarchies' ability to survive the Arab Spring. It defines the Arab Spring in the Gulf monarchies as a series of mass demonstrations by citizens and non-citizens calling for political, economic and social reforms from their respective Gulf governments. These demands mainly revolved around government accountability, corruption, social justice, and political and economic reforms. Throughout the research, the Arab Spring is characterised variously as involving street demonstrations, sit-ins, violent clashes between protestors and police, mass arrests, military assistance from neighbouring countries, and government violations of the constitutional rights of citizens. Of the six monarchies within the GCC, the four most affected by the Arab Spring were Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. The two monarchies that did not experience mass demonstrations were Qatar and the UAE; the reasons for this anomaly perhaps revolving the low percentage of citizens within their respective populations.⁶ This low percentage enabled the governments to provide their citizens with a variety of economic and financial benefits that may have discouraged organised street demonstrations.

⁵ Koerner, K.M.O. (2014). The GCC going East Economic Ties with Developing Asia on the Rise. *Deutsche Bank Research*.

⁶ "The UAE citizen population consisted of 11.5% of the population in 2011." In Chilton, J. (2011). Emiratis are 11.5% of population. *The Emirates Economist*. "The Qatari citizen population consisted of 12% of the total population as of 2013." In Snoj, J. (2013). Qatar's population - by nationality. *BQ Magazine*.

The demonstrations that occurred in the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring were not as large or consistent as those in the Arab republics; the demonstrations in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait involved approximately 1% of the total indigenous population. Meanwhile, in Bahrain, protestors constituted around 40% of citizens.⁷ Regardless of the low percentage turnout in the Gulf monarchies, the fact that citizens took to the streets at all to demand reforms and justice from their respective governments is a tremendous development in the relationship between the ruling elite and the citizen population. In Saudi Arabia and Oman, political and economic discontent is not openly discussed among citizens, nor do governments encourage political participation by citizens. Street demonstrations are a rare occurrence. In Bahrain and Kuwait, on the other hand, discontent at government actions is discussed in the media and among citizens regularly, and street demonstrations had occurred in the past. However, the leaderships' responses to the Arab Spring in these four Gulf monarchies were unprecedented in terms of the intensity of violence and the strengthening of unity among GCC member states. More importantly, the Arab Spring prompted the GCC organisation to become an engaged participant in the domestic affairs of the Gulf monarchies, strengthening unity and fostering collective preservation of their regimes.

Each Gulf monarchy faced demonstrations with varying demands, and each Gulf leadership responded differently due to its particular political structures and governance. Bahrain was exceptional among the Gulf monarchies in terms of both the threat it represented and the magnitude of its demonstrations. At first, the Bahraini demonstrations that occurred in February 2011 were peaceful – young activists calling for

⁷ Zunes, S. (2011). America Blows it on Bahrain. *Foreign Policy in Focus*.

limited political and socio-economic reforms. The demonstrations were non-sectarian⁸ in nature, and large relative to the size of the country; during the following weeks, they would involve around one fifth of Bahrain's half-million population.⁹ Political reforms focused on the constitution and the removal of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, who had held his position since 1971.¹⁰ The Bahraini leadership had had experience in dealing with citizens' demands for reform before the Arab Spring, and had been uncompromising in face of these bottom-up pressures. The crackdown that was launched by the Bahraini ruling elite in mid-February 2011 against the overwhelmingly non-violent protestors was brutal: over 50 people were killed by security forces and pro-government mobs¹¹, more than 1,600 people were arrested, and many of those detainees were tortured to point of death while in custody.¹² Furthermore, more than 4,400 people were dismissed from their jobs due to their support for the demonstrators¹³ and over 40 Shi'a mosques and religious sites were destroyed.¹⁴

On March 14, 2011, the Arab Spring in Bahrain reached a critical point when, at the request of the Bahraini leadership, the GCC sent its combined military force, the

⁸ Aslan, R. (2013). Bahrain's Fake Sectarian War. *Foreign Affairs*.

⁹ Wehrey, F. (2013). Bahrain's Decade of Discontent. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(3), 116–126. 116.

¹⁰ Kinninmont, J. (2012). Bahrain: Beyond the Impasse. *Middle East and North Africa Programme*, Chatham House. 3.

¹¹ *Bahrain Center For Human Rights*. (2011). Individuals Killed By Government's Excessive Use of Force Since 14 February 2011; Davis, C. (2013). Bahrain Unrest: 2nd Anniversary Of Arab Spring As Shiite Protesters Clash With Security Forces. *The Huffington Post*.

¹² Zunes, S. (2013). Bahrain's Arrested Revolution. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 35(2), 149–164.

¹³ *Amnesty International USA*. (n.d.). Bahrain.

¹⁴ Bassiouni, M.C. et al. (2011). *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission Of Inquiry*. Bahrain Independent Commission Of Inquiry.

Peninsula Shield Force (PSF), to help quell the demonstrations. The PSF consisted of mostly Saudi troops; an estimated 1,200 Saudi troops accompanied by an estimated 500 Emirati police, along with a few Qatari troops.¹⁵ The GCC Council of Ministers had responded to the call for help from its member in accordance with the GCC Joint Defense Agreement that asserts: “any harm done to the security of a member state is considered a harm done to the security of all members.”¹⁶ The state-run *Bahrain News Agency* further announced that the PSF has been deployed in line with the principle of common destiny bonding, and that the reason behind the mission was “the common responsibility of the GCC countries in maintaining security and stability”.¹⁷

The demonstrations in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait were on a small scale in comparison to Bahrain; however, equally alarming to the Gulf ruling elite. Saudi Arabia experienced its first demonstrations in late January 2011, influenced by the uprising in Tunis and triggered by a devastating flood in its second-largest city, Jeddah. Demonstrators in Jeddah staged a rally protesting against the city’s poor infrastructure; after dozens were arrested, the Saudi government vowed to improve the city’s infrastructure.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in February and early March 2011, the Kingdom faced further protests in the cities of Jeddah, Dammam, and Riyadh; protestors were calling for the release of political prisoners, labour rights and suffrage for women. The highest number of demonstrations took place in the Eastern Province, instigated by the Shi’a minority living there. The Saudi Shi’a population had long faced discrimination and

¹⁵ *Arab Times*. (2012). Kuwait Naval Units Join Bahrain Mission ... Plot Foiled.

¹⁶ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. (2011). Peninsula Shield Enters Bahrain to Maintain Order.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Alsharif, A. (2011). Saudi plans Jeddah projects after floods, protests. *Reuters*.

marginalisation by the Saudi ruling family.¹⁹ The Saudi Shi'a protestors demanded the release of political prisoners, freedom of expression and assembly and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the Eastern region.²⁰ They further objected to the interference of the GCC force in Bahrain, and demanded its withdrawal. The Saudi government reacted to these demonstrations with an array of violent measures, ranging from mass arrests to lethal force against protestors and torture in prison.²¹ Amnesty International accused Saudi Arabia in a report²² of reacting to the Arab Spring by launching a wave of repression, claiming that hundreds of people were arrested, many of them without charge or trial.²³ It further accused Saudi Arabia of drafting specific laws after the Arab Spring protests to target any form of dissent under the guise of fighting terrorism; Saudi authorities have since decried the report as inaccurate.²⁴

The Sultanate of Oman also experienced a set of early demonstrations in the port city of Sohar, northwest of its capital, Muscat. On January 17, 2011, a small-scale demonstration of an estimated of 200 Omanis protested against the rising prices of basic goods, government corruption, and low wages. Sporadic protests quickly spread across the country, where Omani activists began calling for social, economic and political reform; and were basically prompting the Sultan to restart a neglected political reform

¹⁹ *Reuters*. (2012). Saudi Shi'ites throng funerals of slain protesters.

²⁰ *IRIB World Service*. (2012). Saudi protesters demand cleric release.

²¹ *Human Rights Watch*. (2011). Saudi Arabia: Renewed Protests Defy Ban.

²² *Amnesty International*. (2011). Saudi Arabia: Repression in the Name of Security.

²³ Baker, R. (2011). The Saudi Arab Spring Nobody Noticed. *Global Research*. Center for Research on Globalisation.

²⁴ Hutchins, D. (2012). Will There Be an Arab Spring in Saudi Arabia? *Middle East Voices*.

process.²⁵ Demands included an elected prime minister and parliament, the end to corruption, new cabinet ministers, and more economic opportunities for college graduates and the youth.²⁶ Oman had rarely experienced internal pressures for reform on a mass level; the Omani leadership thus responded to its Arab Spring protests with a mix of violence and political concessions.²⁷ It accelerated the pace and content of its political reforms, while at the same time allowing police violence to occur, leading to the death of at least two protestors.²⁸

In Kuwait, the Bidoon (stateless Arabs) initiated the first set of demonstrations on February 19, 2011, where they demanded their right to Kuwaiti citizenship from the government. This was followed by a series of political demonstrations organised by Kuwaiti youth, political activists and the opposition within the Kuwaiti Parliament. On June 3, 2011 an estimated 500 Kuwaiti citizens gathered in front of Kuwait's parliament building in Erada Square calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah, on grounds of corruption and an end to the political stagnation²⁹ that had hindered the country's economy for a decade. Kuwait had built a record budget surplus of KD 13.2 billion while key decisions on infrastructure and government spending had been sidelined due to continual struggles between the elected parliament

²⁵ Worrall, J. (2011). Oman: The 'Forgotten' Corner of the Arab Spring. *Middle East Policy Council*.

²⁶ Spinner, J. (2011). Oman's Days of Rage: A sleepy little sultanate erupts in unexpected anger. *Foreign Policy*.

²⁷ Ehteshami, A. (2013). *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf: Political Economy, War and Revolution*. London: Routledge. 135.

²⁸ Valeri, M. (2011). The Qaboos-State under the Test of the 'Omani Spring': Are the Regime's Answers Up to Expectations? *Sciences Po*. (2).

²⁹ A stalemate between parliament and government.

and the government.³⁰ Opposition members demanded answers from the prime minister and other government ministers on allegations of corruption, allegations which had become the catalyst for public demands for political reform and the curbing of the ruling family's authoritative powers. Echoing the chants from Cairo's Tahrir Square, the crowds' slogans included the phrase, "The people want to overthrow the head of government", referring to the Prime Minister.³¹ The Kuwaiti government's response to the demonstrations mirrored those of fellow GCC governments in the use of violent measures against protestors, such as police brutality and initiating new laws that would suppress dissent after the Arab Spring. There were no deaths reported in consequence of police violence in Kuwait during the Arab Spring; however, the government further reacted to the demonstrations by repressing freedom of expression and revoking the citizenship of those who voiced their dissent against the government and the Emir.

Whilst Qatar and the UAE did not experience mass demonstrations, the two countries were impacted by the Arab Spring in other Gulf monarchies. All six Gulf monarchies had relied on certain sources of legitimacy that enabled them to preserve their regimes; and since these sources were similar and closely linked, it was acknowledged by all the leaderships that if one Gulf regime fell, the rest would follow. The two leaderships of Qatar and the UAE thus actively supported their neighbouring monarchies' response to the Arab Spring, and joined collaborative GCC efforts to quell the demonstrations in Bahrain and Oman. Both Qatar and the UAE sent troops with the PSF to Bahrain in

³⁰ Al-Sayegh, H. (2012). Politics choke Kuwait's growth prospects. *The National*.

³¹ Laessing, U. (2011). Kuwaitis protest, demand prime minister resign. *Reuters*.

March 2011.³² Furthermore, both monarchies contributed to the GCC financial assistance package to Bahrain and Oman that was announced at the GCC ministerial meeting in Riyadh on March 10, 2011. GCC member states collectively pledged \$20 billion to both countries.³³ The financial package was designed to support the Bahraini and Omani populations by improving economic and social conditions, creating job opportunities for the unemployed, and raising the standard of living overall.³⁴

The research aims to focus on the reactions of the Gulf monarchies to the mass demonstrations of the Arab Spring, and argues that the Arab Spring motivated the Gulf leaderships to intensify cooperation efforts under their regional alliance, the GCC. It hypothesises that the Gulf monarchies utilised the GCC as a vehicle in preserving their regimes during the Arab Spring. GCC member states engaged in collaborative efforts to sustain their regimes, and applied similar tactics within their own borders under a broad GCC strategy for regime preservation. However, any closer GCC union would compromise the sovereignty of the individual monarchies, and thus has yet to be accepted by all six member states. As such, the research's case study focuses on Kuwait and its leadership's response to the Arab Spring and examines how an independent nation was able to restructure its domestic policies to accommodate the interference of a regional alliance in order to preserve its regime and ultimately to survive the Arab Spring.

³² *Arab Times*. (2012).

³³ El-Tablawy, T. (2011). GCC pledges \$20 billion in aid for Oman, Bahrain. *The Washington Post*.

³⁴ Kholaf, D. (2011). GCC "Marshall Plan" to Aid Bahrain and Oman, Al-Qabas Reports. *Bloomberg*.

I. Research Summary

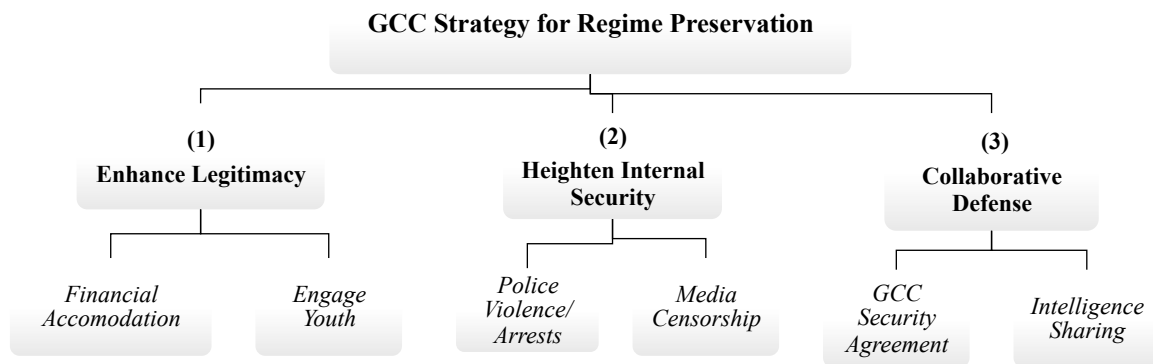
a. Hypothesis

The Arab Spring brought a degree of concern to the Gulf leaderships, leading the most politically liberal among the six GCC members, Kuwait, to engage in a strategy to preserve its regime that was shared by its fellow member states. The hypothesis of this research is that the Gulf monarchies utilised their regional alliance, the GCC, as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring. It further deduces that as the Arab Spring continued the Gulf monarchies began to consolidate their responses to the street demonstrations and engage their regional alliance, the GCC, as a vital participant in securing their regimes against internal threats. The threat of regime change in the region reinforced an existing logic of unity among the members of the GCC. The survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring is thus illuminated in this research by an examination of the coordination and mutual emulation of policies among the GCC member states.

This research builds its hypothesis on the notion of a broad GCC strategy for regime preservation, arguing that the Gulf leaderships used the GCC as a vehicle to preserve their regimes. Such a strategy is not documented GCC policy; nevertheless this research identifies a ‘strategy’ which is very real, arguing that the Gulf monarchies utilised similar tactics involving the GCC in surviving the Arab Spring. It highlights three main tactics of regime preservation employed by the Gulf monarchies: *enhancing their monarchical legitimacy, heightening their internal security, and collaborating in a defence scheme*. The research derives these tactics from the Riyadh Declaration; a document introduced by the Saudi monarchy during the GCC’s 32nd summit in Riyadh in December 2011.

The Gulf leaderships used these tactics to suppress organised dissent and maintain their hold on power; and the involvement of the GCC alliance is clear in each case. The first tactic, of enhancing the leadership's legitimacy, involved providing financial incentives for citizens in return for their support for the respective regimes. The second, of heightened internal security, revolved around the various restrictions applied by the ruling elites during the demonstrations, ranging from police violence to media censorship and the arrest of opposition members for disrupting national security. The third tactic of a collaborative defence scheme involved the signing of the GCC Internal Security Agreement and further plans for joint GCC police and navy forces.

Figure 1: GCC strategy for regime preservation during the Arab Spring (2011)



The GCC strategy for regime preservation was led by Saudi Arabia and followed by the remaining five Gulf monarchies within the organisation. The strategy was developed during the 32nd GCC Summit (annual summits were attended by all six Gulf leaderships), on December 21, 2011, when the Saudi monarch, King Abdullah, presented a proposal to

explore the transformation of the basis of the organisation from cooperation to union.³⁵ He proposed that they “move from a phase of cooperation to a phase of union within a single entity”.³⁶ The Riyadh Declaration marked the beginning of the adoption of a broad strategy for regime preservation by all six members of the GCC. The Declaration represented a plan of action for “tighter financial cooperation, military integration, and foreign policy assimilation”.³⁷ The summit took place in the context of a year of mass street demonstrations and government crackdowns on protestors. In the opening speech of the summit, King Abdulla stated: “Our summit opens in the shadow of challenges that require vigilance and a united stance.”³⁸ The Riyadh Declaration was issued at the end of the two-day summit, outlining what had been agreed upon by the GCC leaders during discussions and closed-door meetings. It highlights the types of action that the GCC leaderships proposed to take towards the objective of a closer GCC union. The following is from the actual text of the Declaration:³⁹

1. “Adoption of the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to move beyond the stage of cooperation to the stage of union so that the GCC countries form a single entity to achieve good and repel evil in response to the aspirations of the citizens of GCC countries and the challenges they face.”

³⁵ *SUSRIS*. (2011). 32nd GCC Summit Final Statement and Riyadh Declaration.

³⁶ *Al-Arabiya*. (2011). Saudi King Abdullah urges GCC ‘to move from phase of cooperation to phase of union.’

³⁷ Al-Saadi, Y. (2011). The Riyadh Declaration: Seeking a Union in the Shadow of the Arab Uprisings. *Al Akhbar*.

³⁸ *SUSRIS*. (2011).

³⁹ *Ibid*.

2. “Speeding up the process of development and comprehensive reform inside their countries so as to achieve greater participation of all citizens, men and women, and open wide future prospects while maintaining security, stability, national cohesion and social welfare.
3. “Improving the domestic front, consolidating the national unity based on equality of all citizens, men and women, before the law and in rights and duties and confronting foreign attempts by troubled entities trying to export its internal crises through sedition, division and sectarian inciting.”
4. “Development of defense and security cooperation to ensure quickly and effectively and in a collective and unified manner confronting any danger or emergency.”
5. “Deepening the common belonging of the GCC youths, improving their identity and protecting their gains by intensifying communication, cooperation and convergence among them and employing educational, media, cultural, sports and scout activities for the service of this goal.”

The statements above represent five out of the eight points listed in the Declaration and are the most crucial to this research. Further commitments were made on attaining the highest degree of economic integration among GCC countries and on activation of a unified foreign policy.⁴⁰ The three tactics are expressed within the text of the Declaration; the GCC strategy for regime preservation is thus based on the policies introduced in the Riyadh Declaration by the Saudi leadership in December 2011. This research proves that the Gulf monarchies engaged with their fellow GCC members in applying this strategy within their domestic policies during the Arab Spring.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The call for collective efforts in “improving the domestic front” and “consolidating the national unity based on equality of all citizens”⁴¹ (point three above) by the Gulf monarchies is remarkable given the GCC’s past record on organisational cooperation. As this research will demonstrate in the literature review, political, economic and defence cooperation among GCC member states was more by necessity than choice. In the economic sphere, the GCC monarchies all share primarily single-sector economies – oil and natural gas resources are the most important sources of income. Due to this resource overlap the GCC monarchies must cooperate in economic development or risk the prospect of harmful competition. Similarly, in the defence and security spheres the collective military resources of the GCC member states counteract other regional actors, namely Iran and Iraq, that have larger populations, more balanced economies, and stronger militaries.⁴² Hence, in order to protect the sovereignties of the Gulf monarchies, a more cooperative GCC organisation is essential. However, GCC cooperation efforts never attained complete unity, where in the realm of defence, cooperation and coordination were limited, and in the realm of economic cooperation, institutional efforts yielded modest results.⁴³

Nevertheless, the Arab Spring provided an opening for the GCC organisation, and for Saudi Arabia as a long-time aspiring leader of the Arab world to attempt to consolidate its regional influence and global profile. Saudi Arabia has been identified as the leader of

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Peterson, E. R. (1988). *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Search for Unity in a Dynamic Region*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 121.

⁴³ Legrenzi, M. (2008). Did the GCC Make a Difference? In Harders, C. & Legrenzi, M., *Beyond regionalism? Regional cooperation, regionalism and regionalization in the Middle East*. Aldershot, England. 111.

a “counter-revolution of the Arab Spring”⁴⁴, whereby it sought to reassert its position of prominence and leadership within the GCC, and in addition, to “contain the Arab Spring.”⁴⁵ This research explores the Saudi leadership’s motivation behind the proposal for a closer GCC union, and analyses the extent of Saudi Arabia’s role in the application of the tactics under the GCC strategy of regime preservation within other GCC countries. The hypothesis argues that the fear of regime change during the Arab Spring prompted the six GCC monarchies to increase cooperation under their regional organisation and apply similar tactics to preserve their regimes. The case study on Kuwait during the Arab Spring sets out to present the evidence that supports the hypothesis. However, an alternative explanation to the evidence provided in the case study is that the Gulf countries are subject to Saudi dominance and were influenced by Saudi Arabia’s determination to exercise repression and to oppose democratic reforms within the subregion. As these tactics were derived from the Riyadh Declaration presented at the GCC summit, one may argue that they are in fact Saudi Arabia’s strategy of regime preservation’, rather than the GCC’s. This thesis proves in the chapters following that the GCC strategy has been utilised to the advantage of all six GCC monarchies. In exploring the reasons behind the emergence of the GCC in 1981 and its main objectives as a regional organisation, this thesis reaches a conclusion where it describes the GCC as an interdependent arrangement that attains the main goal of preserving the regimes of the six Gulf monarchies. The balance of power within this group is reliant on the shared challenges of internal and external security, and the knowledge that if one monarchy

⁴⁴ Jones, T. (2011) Counterrevolution in the Gulf. *United States Institute of Peace*.

⁴⁵ Kamrava, M. (2012). *The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution*. *Orbis*, 56(1), 96–104.

falls, the rest will follow. Saudi Arabia's dominance within the group is mostly evident in its larger landmass and population demographics and its advanced military technology; however, its political legitimacy and survival is aligned with the other five GCC countries. This thesis thus labels the strategy as a 'GCC' strategy because it was agreed upon by all six members and applied by those individual monarchies in respect of their own populations with the end result of the preservation of each regime.

Madawi Al-Rashid, a Saudi professor of social anthropology at King's College London, supports this research's hypothesis in her argument that the real motivation behind the proposed union in December 2011 is that of dictators rallying together to protect themselves from demands for democracy from their own populations. She claims: "[T]he union is an ad hoc response to deep problems that the ruling families are not willing to resolve: giving more power to their citizens, increasing political participation and improving their human rights records."⁴⁶ That said, the reaction of the GCC citizen populations to the announcement of the new GCC union lends an interesting perspective to Saudi Arabia's perceived dominance within the GCC alliance.

In March 2012, the Saudi Foreign minister, Saud Al Faisal, offered a few details on the new GCC union that was proposed in the Riyadh Declaration: first, he insisted that the proposed union must include all six GCC members. He further emphasised a more practical angle, implying that the union was not about political control, but rather about "re-invigorating the GCC".⁴⁷ He indicated that the alliance would allow the GCC to become more efficient and would strengthen cooperation in all fields, including political,

⁴⁶ Abou-Alsamh, R. (2012). Gulf Union Put Off. *Rasheeds World*.

⁴⁷ Matthew, F. (2012). GCC Union: Practical Thinking Required. *Mideast Posts*.

security, military and economic affairs. More importantly, he stressed that the proposal would not infringe on the sovereignty of any member country, stating: “the union ... will not be used as a medium to interfere in their internal affairs. It aims at formulating effective bodies enjoying flexibility and speed and the ability to execute policies and programmes.”⁴⁸

Regardless of the Saudi leadership’s stated intentions, the plan for a closer union has been delayed due to the objections of Gulf citizens concerned that their unique social and political systems would be steamrolled by their dominant Saudi neighbour. One such objection came from the former speaker of the Kuwaiti Parliament, Ahmed Al Saadoun, rebuffing Saudi Arabia’s plan to unify the GCC countries:

*It is very difficult for a country like Kuwait that grants freedom of speech, and where people are represented in parliament, to form a union with countries whose prisons are full of thousands who are guilty [only] of speaking their minds. We will be fooling ourselves if we think that any kind of union can be reached if governments do not offer compromises and start granting their people more rights.*⁴⁹

Such doubts and fears of Saudi dominance expressed by concerned Kuwaiti citizens indicate that the proposal of the new GCC union would not be accepted or moved forward if the Saudi monarchy monopolised it. This research thus discredits the alternative hypothesis that associates Saudi dominance with the survival of the GCC

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

monarchies during the Arab Spring by indicating that such dominance would only work to the disadvantage of the GCC monarchies' political survival.

b. Justification of Case Study

This research presents its case study on Kuwait, the GCC, and the Arab Spring. It will highlight the extent of the role of the GCC in the Kuwaiti leadership's response to its demonstrations and the reinforced GCC union that dominated Kuwaiti domestic policies. It aims to answer why and how the Kuwaiti leadership was able to overcome the political turbulence generated by the Arab Spring, focusing on the reasons why, and the ways through which, the GCC alliance influenced its mechanism to consolidate political power. The case study examines the Kuwaiti Arab Spring between early 2011 and late 2012, the research focusing on this period on the basis of the beginning and end of the timeline for street demonstrations and the government response. The last set of demonstrations took place towards the end of 2012; this was followed by a period of stability and, according to this research, marks the end of the Arab Spring in Kuwait.

Kuwait was selected as the case study from among the six GCC member states for two main reasons: first, Kuwait has an active and elected legislative assembly, as well as a lively media that enjoys considerable freedom of speech. Its freedom of speech and dynamic assembly provides an interesting setting when investigating the role of the GCC in its domestic affairs. The Kuwaiti media has the freedom to present various perspectives on domestic affairs and political incidents; privately owned newspapers and television outlets are constantly seeking the participation of pro-government and pro-opposition analysts and politicians. The ability to have lively debate in the media is a rare occurrence among the Gulf monarchies. Analysis of such debate is a crucial part of the

case study, where access to an array of secondary sources (such as journalists, bloggers, and political analysts) is available.

The second reason why Kuwait was selected for the case study is its significant resistance to the GCC Internal Security Agreement introduced by Saudi Arabia in 1982. Kuwait was the only GCC country that refused to sign the agreement. Article 12 of the agreement authorises the intrusion of other GCC states' security forces into Kuwaiti territory to pursue suspected criminals;⁵⁰ the involvement of other GCC states in Kuwait's domestic affairs raised concerns within Kuwait's assembly, and the Kuwaiti leadership was not willing to risk an increase in tension between its government and its people. Furthermore, unlike any other constitution in the Gulf region, the Kuwaiti Constitution declares that the "the system of government shall be democratic, under which sovereignty resides in the people, the source of all powers".⁵¹ Allowing a foreign entity within its borders would certainly threaten Kuwait's democratic tradition. Thus, the Kuwaiti leadership declared that its government would not sign the security pact unless it was amended to take account of the nation's constitution. The key element to Kuwait's refusal to sign the GCC Internal Security Agreement was the fact that Kuwait resisted the interference of other GCC monarchies in its domestic affairs. However, the threats arising from the Arab Spring contrived to alter the Kuwaiti government's independent domestic policy, and the Kuwaiti leadership unexpectedly decided to sign the GCC Internal Security Agreement in November 2012. Kuwait's decision to sign the GCC agreement

⁵⁰ Ramazani, R. & Kechichian, J. (1988). *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Record and Analysis*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. 35.

⁵¹ The Constitution of the State of Kuwait.

corroborates this research's hypothesis by indicating that the Gulf monarchies began to consolidate their responses to the Arab Spring in a collaborative manner.

In its initial response to the Arab Spring, the Kuwaiti leadership utilised the first tactic mentioned above, of enhancing its legitimacy by providing financial incentives to its citizens and reinforcing government-sponsored youth programmes to engage Kuwaiti youth. The involvement of the GCC in this tactic is demonstrated by increasing efforts to integrate with GCC youth programmes and Kuwait's commitment to interaction with the political, economic, social and security changes and challenges of each member state as declared in the Riyadh Declaration and reiterated in the Sakhir Declaration in December 2012.⁵² The second tactic, heightening internal security, is highlighted by the various restrictions applied by the Kuwaiti leadership during the Arab Spring, ranging from police violence to media censorship and the arrest of key opposition members. The third tactic, of collaborating in a defence scheme, revolves around the signing of the GCC Internal Security Agreement by all six member states in November 2012. A month later, the GCC Supreme Council also announced its intention to create a joint military command and police force,⁵³ further altering Kuwait's current internal security strategy and ultimately raises the prospect of curbing Kuwait's liberal policies.

Overall, the case study on Kuwait during the Arab Spring highlights the relationship between the Gulf monarchies and their regional alliance, the GCC. It showcases the unity and support of GCC member states at times of crisis, yet also depicts the suspicious nature of the relationships between them, especially with regard to the fear of Saudi

⁵² *Gulf News*. (2012). Full Text of the GCC Sakhir Declaration.

⁵³ *SUSRIS*. (2013). 34th GCC Summit Concludes.

domination shared by the smaller member states. The research lays out the details of domestic politics in Kuwait, from presenting the historical political background to evaluating Kuwait's active parliamentary politics, analysing the constitution and examining the economic and political atmosphere before the Arab Spring. It proceeds to outline each demonstration that occurred during the Arab Spring and the Kuwaiti leadership's responses and reactions in the face of demonstrations. It provides details on the demands of the demonstrators and their ethnic/religious/social backgrounds. More importantly, the case study proves that by utilising tactics under the broad GCC strategy for regime preservation, the Kuwaiti leadership allowed unprecedented GCC interference in its domestic affairs and thus engaged the GCC organisation as a vital participant in securing its regime during the Arab Spring.

c. Methodology

The main research question this research addresses revolves around the role of the GCC in the survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring. The Gulf regional structure emerged due to various security, political and economic challenges and opportunities, resulting in closer relations among the six Gulf monarchies. The Arab Spring provides the opportunity to discuss how the Gulf leaderships utilised their regional organisation, the GCC, as a vehicle to preserve their regimes; the interdependent relationship between the GCC and the Gulf leaderships; and the influence of the GCC in the domestic affairs of the Gulf monarchies. According to these considerations, the research question is as follows:

What is the relationship between the Gulf monarchies and their regional alliance, the GCC, and how have Gulf leaders utilised the GCC as a vehicle to preserve their regimes?

This research follows the qualitative research method, using a mix of primary and secondary sources. I take an analytical, rather than theoretical, approach to comparative politics in order to make a political and historical analysis of the domestic and foreign policies of the Gulf monarchies. My fieldwork was based in Kuwait from October 2011 to December 2013, where I had access to government officials and academics who specialise in Gulf politics. I consulted a number of key officials and diplomats at the highest level of the GCC and the Kuwaiti government. The secondary sources are government documents, newspaper reports, media interviews, blogs and academic research.

On December 10–11, 2013 I attended the 34th GCC summit in Kuwait. The summit was under the chairmanship of the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and was attended by the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince, Salman ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saud (the current Saudi king); the newly appointed Qatari Emir, Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani accompanied by his father, Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani; the Bahraini Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa; the Omani Deputy Prime Minister, Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said; and the UAE representative Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai. The GCC Secretary-General, Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, gave the opening speech. He stated that the main issues to be discussed were GCC nationalisation,

security, stability, and economic integration.⁵⁴ For the first time in GCC summit history, the speaker of the Kuwait National Assembly, Marzoug Al-Ghanim, was invited to give a speech at the opening. The inclusion of the Kuwaiti legislature represents a crucial element in this research where it presents the GCC leaders as sending a message to their population that they are willing to engage and listen to public demands. Another crucial element of the 34th GCC summit was the attendance of the newly appointed Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim; he gave a speech at the closing session, welcoming the GCC leaders to hold the next summit in Doha. At thirty-four, he is the youngest reigning monarch among the GCC states, and his appointment as Emir is evidence that the Gulf monarchies are open to change if it means that they can continue their dynastic hold on power.

The summit was held against the backdrop of highly tense relations among the six Gulf monarchies. Days before the GCC summit, the Omani Foreign Minister, Yousef Bin Alawi, stated in a security conference in Manama, Bahrain that while Oman would not stand in the way of member states turning the GCC into a confederation, it was opposed to the idea and would “simply withdraw from the new body”.⁵⁵ The statement was perceived as “blunt” by the Saudis, who were already resentful towards Oman due to a secret dialogue facilitated by Sultan Qaboos bin Said (Oman’s ruler) between the United States and Iran that culminated in the Geneva agreement.⁵⁶ I was seated next to the Omani

⁵⁴ The opening and closing sessions of the 34th Gulf Cooperation Council Summit. Personal attendance, 10–11 Dec. 2013, Kuwait.

⁵⁵ *Gulf News*. (2013). GCC Union ‘Not on Summit Agenda’.

⁵⁶ Al-Rasheed, M. (2013). Omani rejection of GCC union adds insult to injury for Saudi Arabia. *Al Monitor*.

delegation that included a member of the Omani Ministry of Justice. When asked about the incident, he replied in a respectful yet suspicious manner that the issue was blown out of proportion in the press. Overall, the atmosphere at the summit was friendly.

During my fieldwork in Kuwait, I attended a huge opposition rally that attracted around 50,000 participants on November 11, 2012 in the Erada Square opposite the Kuwaiti parliament building. The participants were a mix of Islamist supporters, tribal groups, youth activists, and former parliament opposition members. The rally commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Kuwaiti Constitution, and most of the speeches delivered by opposition members highlighted the glory of the constitution and citizens' right to protect it. It was a peaceful protest that took place less than a month after the March of Dignity protest, which had involved 100,000 and started as peaceful but ended in police violence. The March of Dignity protest was mainly about an Emiri (royal) decree to amend the electoral law in October 2012; however, the protestors' demands also included issues such as corruption, government accountability, and a lack of infrastructure development due to legislative deadlock.⁵⁷

On March 21, 2012 I had access to the first Secretary-General of the GCC, Abdulla Bishara, who held the post from its establishment in 1981 until 1993. I visited him at his office in Kuwait City, which the 78-year-old attends almost every morning as his daily routine. His tone on the GCC was full of pride, inasmuch as he believes that the GCC was hugely successful in its security achievements. He highlighted that the GCC states survived three wars⁵⁸ and kept their borders safe. He said: "the power of the GCC is in its

⁵⁷ Westall, S. (2012). Pampered but Restless, Many Young Kuwaitis Want More. *Reuters*.

⁵⁸ The Iran Iraq War (1980-1989), The Gulf War (1990-1991) and the US War on Iraq (2003).

ability to protect and keep intact the territory and system of the states.” I asked him about the peculiarity of Article 4 of the GCC Charter – why it failed to mention the aspect of security as a main goal of cooperation. He answered that the GCC had “the shadows of Iraq, the radical Arabs, and Iran on its shoulders”; which represented the threatening regional circumstances at the time. Hence, the authors of the Charter wanted to omit any military pact in order to avoid the criticism of pan-Arabists or risk antagonising their neighbours. Other meetings were held with current key GCC officials within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuwait, and several prominent academics in Kuwait, including the dean of social sciences at Kuwait University and author of a book on Kuwait and the Gulf, Dr. Abdulredha Assiri.⁵⁹ I also met with a leading human rights activist and professor at Kuwait University, Dr. Ghanem Al-Najjar, and political analyst Dr. Shafeeq Al-Ghabra on more than one occasion. I was thus able to accumulate key analyses of the Kuwaiti political scene and the official and unofficial opinions of the GCC regarding the Arab Spring.

My participation in several conferences on the Gulf region also helped my analysis of the Arab Spring in the Gulf. In July 2013, I attended the Gulf Research Meeting at Cambridge, UK which highlighted issues of importance in the Gulf region and provided an academic environment to foster Gulf studies and encourage scholarly exchange. It gathered together hundreds of key academics, researchers, policy makers and diplomats. I met leading academics specialising in Gulf politics such as Dr John Duke Anthony, the founding president of the National Council on US–Arab Relations in Washington, DC. He is the only American to have been invited to each of the GCC’s Ministerial and Heads

⁵⁹ Assiri, A.R. (1990). *Kuwait's Foreign Policy: City-state in World Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

of State summits since the GCC's inception in 1981. He is also a regular lecturer on the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf for the U.S. Department of Defense and State. I had the opportunity to have a lunch meeting with him discussing my research and, more importantly, listening to his views on the GCC and the Gulf monarchies. During the conference, I participated in a workshop headed by Paul Arts and Saud Al Tamamy, and attended lectures by academics such as Luciani Zaccara, James Dorsey, Sean Foley, and Sylvia Colombo. I also met the current GCC Secretary-General, Dr Abdullatif Al-Zayani, who attended the opening session of the conference at Cambridge.

The information gathered in this research is thus derived from a wide variety of official and informal sources and relies on key academic figures who specialise in the Gulf region. The important work of Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Mehran Kamrava, R.K. Ramazani, Gregory Gause, Sean Yom, Eric Peterson, Jill Crystal, Mary-Ann Tetreault, Abdulkhaleg Abdulla and many more provided valuable sources covering the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the Gulf monarchies. They constitute an important component of Middle Eastern literature, and this research based the foundation of its hypothesis and case study on their notable research. Building on their contribution to knowledge, this research expanded on the crucial work of three main scholarly contributions by Jill Crystal, Mehran Kamrava, Sean Yom and Gregory Gause.

Jill Crystal provided crucial information on the political histories of the Gulf monarchies and the development of their political structures, specifically on the development of parliamentary politics in Kuwait.⁶⁰ Crystal outlined the gradual

⁶⁰ Crystal, J. (1989). Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar. *Comparative Politics*, 21(4), 427–443.

transformation and historical events that led to the emergence of the Kuwaiti political system today. From the pre-oil relationship between Kuwaiti society and leadership, to the promulgation of the first Kuwaiti constitution and the establishment of the welfare system, Crystal provided this research with key facts surrounding the survival strategy of the Kuwaiti monarchy throughout history. The instalment of an ‘inclusive’ political system by the Kuwaiti monarchy came hand in hand with engaging with various social coalitions and distributing economic benefits in order to keep control of parliamentary politics. This research was able to build on Crystal’s key historical findings by tracing the issues surrounding the Kuwaiti Arab Spring back to the origins of the Kuwaiti political system. In its case study, this research outlines the tactics utilised by the Kuwaiti leadership in response to the street demonstrations that occurred, and goes further to include the dynamics of the Gulf regional alliance, the GCC, in the survival strategy of the Kuwaiti monarchy.

Another important scholarly work by Mehran Kamrava also provides this research with a foundation on which to build its hypothesis claims. Kamrava was one of the key scholars to outline the main sources of legitimacy amongst the Gulf monarchies; he argues that the Gulf monarchies have relied on certain sources of legitimacy that have enabled them to establish and maintain their political dynasties. The historical tradition of tribalism and Islam, the British influence and colonial legacy, and the vast amount of oil wealth represent these key sources.⁶¹ This research utilises Kamrava’s sources of

⁶¹ Kamrava, M. (2005). *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 299.

legitimacy to provide a historical background to the Gulf monarchies and the development of their political structures.

A third scholarly contribution made by Sean Yom and Gregory Gause provided this research with key insights, and was a more relevant source in that it also discussed the Gulf monarchies' reactions to the Arab Spring in 2011. In their research,⁶² Gause and Yom highlight the new theory of monarchical exceptionalism, and attribute three overlapping factors to the Gulf monarchies' survival of the Arab Spring: cross-cutting coalitions, hydrocarbon rents (oil wealth revenues), and foreign patrons. Their contribution to the explanation of the monarchical exceptionalism theory provides a foundation for this research's hypothesis, where it argues a fourth reason for the Gulf monarchs' ability to stay in power during the chaotic events of the Arab Spring: the interdependence of the Gulf monarchies under their regional organisation, the GCC. This research argues that with the support of fellow Gulf monarchs, the Gulf ruling elites were able to preserve their autocratic rule through the support of their regional alliance, the GCC.

Overall, there is a vast amount of academic research about the Gulf monarchies and the GCC; however, there is a gap in the literature concerning the role of the GCC in the domestic affairs of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring, which this research aims to fill. The significance of examining the role of the GCC in the survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring lies in illustrating the increasing influence of the GCC alliance in the domestic affairs of the Gulf monarchies. The consequences of the

⁶² Yom, S .L., & Gause, F.G. (2012). Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On. *Journal Of Democracy*, 23(4), 74–88.

Arab Spring accentuate the GCC as a complex and pragmatic regional organisation that acts as a ‘safety net’ for its member states. This research thus adds an original contribution to current knowledge by illuminating the role of the GCC in the survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring. In presenting its case study on the Kuwaiti Arab Spring, this research offers a distinctive study on the relationship between the GCC alliance and its member states. Its dimension of emphasising the role of a regional alliance in the survival of a regime may be used in other studies that focus on regional organisations and regime durability.⁶³

Another key contribution to literature by this research is its analysis on the survival strategies developed by the monarchical regimes while facing internal challenges. This research presents the three tactics of regime preservation utilised by the monarchies under the umbrella of their regional alliance, the GCC as a unique comparative tool within the case study. The case study on Kuwait examines the recent and politically significant events that occurred in Kuwait during the Arab Spring in 2011-2012. After presenting the origins of Kuwaiti politics and the background of political legitimacies within the Gulf region, the case study begins with an analysis of the build-up of political events that occurred in Kuwait before the Arab Spring in 2011, and further examines the Arab Spring demonstrations that occurred in the aftermath of these events. It proceeds to analyse the coordination of policies among the GCC monarchies during 2011-2012, and underlines the shared tactics that were utilised by the Kuwaiti government in reaction to its domestic demonstrations. The strategy of regime preservation outlines the tactics of

⁶³ For example, within the concept of monarchical exceptionalism, the role of a regional alliance utilised as a safety net may be added as a key element in the durability of a monarchy.

enhancing legitimacy, heightening internal security and collaborating in a defence scheme and hence may be applied to other authoritarian regimes around the world as a comparative study and utilised in an analysis on the sustainability and durability of dictatorships. This research advances previous research on the Gulf region by illuminating the role of a regional alliance in the durability of the monarchical regimes and also by highlighting three key tactics that were utilised by these monarchies during the recent events of the Arab Spring.

d. Chapter Structure

Chapter one provides an important component in this research because it examines the regional structure of the GCC and past reactions of GCC monarchies to internal and external threats. It first presents an analysis of the main objectives of the GCC, its charter and its cooperation efforts in the political, economic and defence realms during the Iran–Iraq war. It then analyses the cooperation efforts among the GCC monarchies in the Post-Cold War era, highlighting three main events that highly impacted the Gulf region: the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the initiation of the U.S. war of terror in 2001, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. It seeks to examine the cooperation efforts among the GCC monarchies in response to these events and thus provides a comparative analysis of their collective response to the Arab Spring in 2011. The chapter goes on to present a summary of the Arab Spring in the Gulf monarchies of Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia, and explores how they responded to the Arab Spring in the context of the GCC strategy for regime preservation. The main purpose of this chapter is to prepare for the case study by providing a general account of other Gulf countries’ experience during the Arab Spring, before presenting the Kuwaiti case study.

Chapters two and three present the background to the case study on Kuwait, providing the historical foundation of Kuwait's political history. Chapter two begins by presenting the origins of Kuwaiti politics dating back to the 1800s, and delves into the development of its political system. It touches on Kuwait's first political crisis in 1938, the British Protectorate relationship with the Al Sabah rulers and the effects of oil on the domestic politics of the Al Sabah regime. It goes on to present the social divisions within Kuwaiti society and the significance of the institution of citizenship in Kuwaiti politics. It ends with an analysis of the Kuwaiti Constitution and electoral process. Chapter three also offers a foundation for the case study, where it explores the three phases of parliamentary politics in Kuwait, from 1962–2002. It provides the history of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, the main events that led to its establishment, and the achievements and failures of the first parliaments. It then presents an analysis of the advancement of parliamentary politics in Kuwait and identifies the main political groupings within the Kuwaiti National Assembly. It continues with a description of the series of events that occurred on the Kuwaiti political scene from 2002 until the Arab Spring in 2011.

Chapter four presents the case study and ties together all aspects of the research, 'Kuwait, the GCC and the Arab Spring'. It provides the details of the Kuwaiti experience during the Arab Spring; it describes the types of demonstrations that occurred, the demands made by the protestors and the Kuwaiti government's response to the demonstrations. This chapter is the final link of the research, where it connects Kuwait's turbulent political history with the impacts of the Arab Spring and the role of the GCC in its government's response. It continues to present the three tactics under the GCC strategy for regime preservation; utilisation of these tactics indicates that the Kuwaiti

government felt threatened by the Arab Spring and feared the complete destruction of its regime structure. The case study corroborates the hypothesis that there is a strong correlation between the unity and support of the GCC alliance and the Kuwaiti leadership's capacity to maintain its regime status during the Arab Spring. Its place within the GCC has influenced its domestic policies, especially through the heightening of its internal security precautions. The Kuwaiti interior ministry began a series of mass arrests of a number of Twitter and social media participants who had criticised the monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE. Kuwait further began to allow the GCC member states to intrude into its domestic politics through an increase of coordination and emulation of policies among GCC member states, such as a GCC unified youth strategy and a GCC unified police and navy force. The case study proves that by utilising tactics under the broad GCC strategy for regime preservation, the Kuwaiti leadership allowed unprecedented GCC interference in its domestic affairs, and thus engaged the GCC organisation as a vital participant in securing its regime during the Arab Spring.

II. Literature Review

A literature review on the Gulf monarchies and their regional alliance, the GCC, is key in providing this thesis with a backbone. This research thus divides the literature review into two main sections: the first section presents the historical foundation of the Gulf monarchies by highlighting the three sources of legitimacy based on the research of Mehran Kamrava. The second section highlights brief summaries of the various academic contributions to the analysis of the GCC organisation.

a. Sources of Legitimacy

Several scholars have already established the main sources of legitimacy amongst the Gulf monarchies, and this research highlights the work of Mehran Kamrava in his book, *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*, where he establishes that the historical tradition of tribalism and Islam, the British influence and colonial legacy, and the vast amount of oil wealth, all represent the primary sources of legitimacy that have enabled the Gulf monarchies to establish and maintain their unique political structures up to the present day.⁶⁴ The main objective in examining the sources of legitimacy in this research is to answer one question: have the building blocks of the Gulf political structures enhanced the monarchical resilience of the Gulf ruling elites? This research concludes that these building blocks represent a combination of internal and external factors: external factors involve British influence, while internal factors are the political practices of traditional tribalism. Meanwhile, the discovery of oil and the utilisation of its wealth represent both internal and external factors. These factors have evolved into sources and levers of legitimacy for the Gulf monarchies, influential in enabling the Gulf leaderships to not only create modern bureaucratic governmental systems that buttress their predominant interests, but also transition (and in many cases, strengthen) their traditional political structures into modern nation-states. Their ability to develop systems of government using a combination of old and new methods defines Gulf political systems.

⁶⁴ Kamrava (2005). 299.

The British role in the process of state formation among the Gulf monarchies is overarching in its significance and represents a key source of legitimacy for the Gulf ruling families. This research highlights British support as a crucial element in the transformation of the ruling tribes into the current Gulf regimes. In fact, up until the 1950s and 1960s, most of the Gulf ruling families governed through a combination of British diplomatic and material protection, traditional and tribal legitimacy and a reservoir of tribal recruits who could be relied upon if a domestic military challenge arose. Emerging as the most influential foreign power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British Empire radically altered the development and formation of the political and economic dynamics of the Gulf region. Since Britain perceived the Persian Gulf as a critical passageway to India, its crown jewel, it entered into protectorate agreements with local Gulf leaders in order to ensure the safety of the passageway. Gradually throughout the twentieth century, the British found increasing reason to depend on local leaders to exercise more control over their territories and people, thus granting them international legitimacy and, eventually, the resources and support necessary for ascent to kingship.⁶⁵

Between 1820 and 1920, the British strategically introduced political residencies reinforced by a strong naval presence throughout the Gulf region.⁶⁶ The first, preliminary British–Gulf treaty was signed on January 6, 1820, the ruler of Sharjah signing on behalf of the rulers of Ajman and Umm al-Qaiwan, representing three of the present-day

⁶⁵ Kamrava, M. (2011). *International Politics of the Persian Gulf*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. 3.

⁶⁶ Foley, S. (2010). *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 16.

emirates that constitute the UAE.⁶⁷ Further treaties were established between the British and the rulers of Ras Al-Khaimah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Bahrain, leading to a General Treaty of Peace signed towards the end of January 1820 by nine Gulf rulers.⁶⁸ These treaties outlawed piracy and made subtle allusion to the British acting as the policeman of the Gulf. The British faced rivalries with other European powers (mainly the French) over India, and the Gulf region was perceived as an extension of their Indian interests. The General Treaty of Peace forbade any foreign contacts by the emirates, except with the British, preventing the Gulf rulers from signing or abrogating any agreement with foreign nations without British consent. Nor were they to grant concessions for the exploration of oil or other minerals to any foreign country or company without prior consultation with the British government. In return, Britain undertook the defence of the Emirates against any internal or external threats and proposed to dictate their foreign policies on their behalf. Similar agreements were made with the rulers of Kuwait in 1913, Bahrain in 1914, and the emirates of the lower Gulf and Oman in the 1920s. These agreements provided the British with exclusive rights to be the sole beneficiary of oil concessions in the region.⁶⁹

To maintain their influence in the Gulf region, the British utilised a ‘carrot and stick’ strategy that applied both soft and hard pressure on the local rulers. Even though the British generally avoided involving themselves in the internal politics of the Gulf states,

⁶⁷ Lorimer, J. G. (1986). *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*. Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions. 3.

⁶⁸ O'Sullivan, E. (2008). *The New Gulf: How Modern Arabia is Changing the World for Good*. Dubai: Motivate Publishing. 74.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 37.

they capitalised on the fact that most of the Gulf rulers were weak and constantly challenged by internal and external rivalries.⁷⁰ The British used three main methods of control in the Gulf region: applying a divide-and-rule policy within Gulf society and among the Gulf rulers; isolating the Gulf states from the political developments of the greater Middle East region by aligning their foreign policies with Western interests; and providing financial and military support to squash any internal rivalry to the standing Gulf ruler (a good example was British military support to Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia in quelling the Ikhwan rebellion in 1927).⁷¹ In examining these British methods of control, one may draw pertinent conclusions on the extent of British influence on present-day Gulf political structures. Overall, this research asserts that the British role in the process of state formation within the Gulf region was instrumental. The British not only demarcated territorial boundaries within the region, but also sanctioned (and in some cases endorsed) the political legitimacy of the sheikhs, emirs, sultans and kings of the Gulf emirates. In applying their methods of control, the British were able to establish a relationship of mutual gain with the Gulf rulers and enhance the position of the rulers' domestically and internationally.

This research highlights the second source of legitimacy utilised by the Gulf monarchies as the historical concepts of tribalism and Islam. The concepts of tribalism are central to an understanding of the historical foundation of the Gulf political systems. The establishment of all six of the Gulf states depended very heavily on the ability of the Gulf ruling families to mobilise military and political support from surrounding Arab

⁷⁰ Foley (2010), 16.

⁷¹ Wynbrandt, J. (2010). *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Infobase Publishing. 185.

tribes. Rulers deliberately made use of tribal and Islamic practices in order to build their legitimacy and instruments of control, one reason being that they knew of no other method than the ancestrally traditional practices. The practice of consultation, for example, was derived from the Najdi Bedouin cultural tradition where the Arab tribal sheikh was characterised as first among equals, and bound to consult his tribesmen before taking action on any matter, thus preventing the political pitfalls of autocratic leadership. With traditional values still prevalent, indeed dominant, in Gulf society, the rulers were able to capitalise on the tribal importance of religious and social status, personal connections, and attitudes towards kinship that include respect for leading families.⁷²

A key tribal concept that has been used by the Gulf rulers in order to build their legitimacy and instruments of control is the system of power sharing, or the time-honoured method of consultation and access between the ruler and the people. There are three forms of tribal power-sharing: the forming of strategic alliances through partnerships and intermarriage, the practice of the *majlis*, and the system of patronage through placing family members and friends in strategically influential positions. These tribal methods remain important as vehicles of control and legitimacy among the Gulf ruling families, where the retention and re-invention of their traditional forms represent the main social contract between the ruler and the people. The ruling families made use of these tribal concepts in order to secure and maintain political leverage throughout the years of their establishment, manage their political system and safeguard their dynastic security. At the same time, the use of tribal traditions also explains the survival of the

⁷² Nonneman, G. (2008). Political Reform in the Gulf Monarchies. In A. Ehteshami & S. Wright (eds), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*. Essay. Reading: Ithaca Press. 3.

historic elements of civil society (an example is the case of Kuwait and its active tradition of ‘*diwaniyas*’).⁷³

Prior to the discovery of oil, within a tribal community the leader of the tribe essentially served as a spokesperson rather than a ruler, consulting tribal, religious, and notable people of wealth and influence, usually merchants within the community, before making a decision. A ruling coalition usually occurred between the ruler and a strong alliance of families (either a group of business elites or a dominant religious sect) that profited both sides in terms of political and economic power. A strategic alliance between the ruler and an influential social, economic, or political class formed the classical model for a tribal form of power sharing, a common practice throughout the Arabian Peninsula.⁷⁴ Their principal instrument of power was the threat of secession, where if they found themselves in dispute with the ruler, they would leave the settlement and take their wealth with them, most likely to form alliances elsewhere. Since the ruler financially depended on the merchants, this created the incentive to take decisions based on a ‘balance of power’. Until the discovery of oil, this threat was a powerful check on the rulers, enabling the merchants to ‘use their voice’ and become active in political and economic decision making.⁷⁵

Another form of tribal power sharing or popular participation is found in the concept of consultation by society members through the practice of a *majlis*, or open meeting

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Khalaf, A. & Luciani, G. (2006). Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf. *Gulf Research Center*. Dubai, 41.

⁷⁵ Crystal, J. (1990). *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 21.

between citizens and members of the ruling families.⁷⁶ The *majlis* opens the door to members of society, especially to the religious community, but also to tribal factions and the merchant classes. The ruler would come to a decision on the basis of consensus after hearing a variety of opinions on various matters. The concept of the *majlis* is surrounded by misconceptions, however, where several political researchers have romanticised the availability of the ruler to his people through the practice. In reality, accessibility to the ruler varied as between various groups in Gulf societies. Besides women being excluded from the *majlis*, the rulers were selective in allowing particular social, ethnic, professional, and tribal groups to attend. In broad terms, rulers for the most part consulted with three main groups: merchants, tribal allies, and religious authorities. Indeed, this pattern is still prevalent, and with the exclusion of migrants and expatriate workers living in the Gulf, a large percentage of society is thus politically marginalised.⁷⁷

A third tribal concept of power sharing is seen in the system of patronage – placing family members and friends in strategically influential positions.⁷⁸ Most Gulf rulers install family members and non-family trusted individuals in key governmental positions, such as within the realms of internal security and defence, and the Ministry of Petroleum.⁷⁹ Such controlled placements ensure loyalty and further enhance the ruler's position within the ruling family dynamic. However, the practice of placing allies in key positions has

⁷⁶ Peterson (1988), 28.

⁷⁷ Niethammer, K. (2011). Political Reform and Foreign Policy in Persian Gulf Monarchies. In Kamrava (2011). 241.

⁷⁸ Peterson (1988), 27.

⁷⁹ Alkim, H. H. (1994). *The GCC States in an Unstable World: Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Small States*. London: Saqi Books. 52.

triggered a negative reaction among the more enlightened and well-travelled Gulf population, who see the political pitfalls of presenting the ruling family as being apparently above the law, and having limitless power to change or reverse policies underwritten by their parliaments.

Overall, the historical tradition of power sharing can be seen as an important source of legitimacy for these Gulf monarchs, where they continue to capitalise on the authority achieved by their ancestors in order to preserve their regimes. These tribal methods were common throughout the Gulf region, and each modern-day Gulf government adopted different ways to institutionalise them. Some Gulf rulers, such as in Kuwait and Bahrain, established national assemblies elected by the public, while the ruling elites of the UAE, Qatar and Oman instituted elected and semi-elected consultative councils.⁸⁰ Aware of the value of each of these three tribal traditions, the Gulf rulers installed them within the political culture of their countries.

A third and final source of legitimacy highlighted by this research is the Gulf monarchies' newfound oil wealth. The importance of oil to Gulf socio-economic and political development is paramount. In fact, "oil is the tool that in a short period of time transformed these countries into modern politics with sophisticated national economies."⁸¹ After World War II, oil represented an external commodity to the Gulf population, where Western oil companies controlled the oil wells of the region, and sold it to Western consumers, pocketing the bulk of the profits. It was not until the 1950s that oil became a national asset to the Gulf monarchies; a change brought about by the fifty-

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ehteshami (2013), 49.

fifty oil profit arrangement.⁸² The Gulf leaderships increased their stake in oil profits and began the drive towards economic development and state modernisation. From the late 1950s to the eve of the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, the Gulf monarchies were beginning to rely on the oil sector as the foundation of their new economies, and investing their oil revenues in the development of their nations’ welfare systems and infrastructure. In 1966, the Gulf monarchies were earning approximately \$2.5 billion in oil income.⁸³

In 1973, a dramatic change occurred in the oil profit arrangement, further increasing national ownership of hydrocarbon resources in the region. The switch of control in terms of participation and nationalisation came between 1972 and 1976; by contrast, for decades the major oil companies had been the ones who set the oil prices, with no voice for the Gulf producer countries’ governments. This position was addressed by the local governments through their participation in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and eventually turned to their advantage when they were able to take over the control of production levels.

By virtue of the growing strength of the OPEC cartel, the concessions that had previously been extended to international oil companies by oil-exporting states

⁸² After learning that the company, renamed Aramco (Arab-American Oil Company), in 1944 paid more in U.S. taxes than in royalties, the Saudi government demanded renegotiation of the division of royalties. The resulting agreement between Aramco and the Saudi government, also known as the “50/50 Agreement”, set the precedent of equal sharing of income from petroleum in the Middle East, and paved the way to nationalisation of petroleum reserves. In Anon. The Saudi-Aramco “50/50” Agreement, December 30, 1950. *Longman World History*.

⁸³ Ehteshami (2013), 52.

*were revised such that control and then exclusive ownership of oil operations were assumed by the respective governments.*⁸⁴

The nationalisation of the oil industry and the rush to secure economic development presented a notable shift in terms of the strengthening of the internal ruling forces in the Gulf and the weakening of the external forces (i.e. the oil companies). As the oil-producing Gulf governments began expanding their knowledge base in terms of technology and general management skills, the Western oil companies lost their access to equity crude oil.⁸⁵ The distribution of oil wealth changed Gulf political dynamics dramatically, resulting in a steady bureaucratisation of the monarchies and the development of modern civil services. The Gulf rulers used their newfound oil wealth to consolidate internal and external alliances, and effectively applied it as a crucial source of legitimacy. Modern armed forces were created instantly, providing for an official institution through which tribal support could be channelled and maintained. A pyramidal power structure emerged, with the royal family at the top, supported by the civil service and the armed forces.⁸⁶ This structure would continue to increase the power of the royal families and diminish the influence of the tribal families and any other significant elements of rule that existed prior to the emergence of the oil wealth.⁸⁷ “Oil income has allowed the ruling families of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to engineer a

⁸⁴ Peterson (1988), 38.

⁸⁵ Davies, C. (1992). *Global Interests in the Arab Gulf*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 72.

⁸⁶ Kamrava (2005), 299.

⁸⁷ An interesting example is the Kuwaiti business elites who shared political power with the Al Sabah family prior to the discovery of oil.

relatively soft, rent-and-patronage-based authoritarianism characterized by multiple centers of power and huge institutional redundancies.”⁸⁸

It is important to stress that it was not the mere existence of oil wealth that was a critical component of state formation; rather, it was how the Gulf ruling families responded and utilised the influx of oil revenues in the consolidation of their regimes. The rise of oil revenues enabled the Gulf rulers to construct their modern states at lightning speed; however, existing political arrangements prior to oil (the role of the British and the use of traditional politics) had already placed the ruling families in a privileged position from which they could dominate the newly formed oil-rich states.⁸⁹

Table 1: Income from Oil, 1957–66 (\$million) ⁹⁰

	1957	1959	1961	1963	1966
Iran	213	263	301	398	607
Iraq	137	243	266	308	394
Kuwait	338	405	464	555	680
Saudi Arabia	323	315	396	489	805
Others (Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Qatar)	57	69	70	83	208

The role of oil in the process of state formation has a distinct political aspect, where the Gulf governments had acquired enormous wealth without the need to tax their

⁸⁸ Hertog, S. (2011). Rentier Militaries in the Gulf States: The Price of Coup-Proofing. *International Journal Of Middle East Studies*. 43(03), 400–402. 400.

⁸⁹ Gause, F.G. (1994). Oil monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf states. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press. 21.

⁹⁰ OPEC, *Annual Statistical Bulletin* (various years); Europa Publications, *The Middle East and North Africa Yearbook* (various years). In Ehteshami (2013), 53.

citizens, providing them with immense political leverage. Oil revenues were directly forwarded to state treasuries from the international economy, thus allowing the government to control its distribution and signally affect the whole domestic economy with unique mechanisms of political control. In the West, the concept of government comes hand in hand with the concept of taxation; the need to tax has led to an awareness that taxpayers should have a voice in how their governments are run. In the Gulf monarchies, however, the oil boom in the 1970s provided a different model of state/society relations. The necessity to extract money from society in order to govern was overturned; the Gulf governments were faced with the question of how to spend the wealth, rather than how to extract it from their societies.⁹¹ This model has given rise to a new term to describe these states within the political science realm: the distributive, or rentier, state:

*The rentier state is one in which government relies for the lion's share of its revenues on direct transfers from the international economy, in the form of oil revenues, investment income, foreign aid, or other kinds of direct payments.*⁹²

The rentier nature of the Gulf monarchical structure brought several political consequences during the process of state building. The first was derived from the dominant role of government in local economies; the private sector was dependent on the government for access to capital – controlled by the government – and obtaining licences and permissions to conduct business. With such a pivotal role in the economy, the government had the ability to reward its allies and punish its opponents. The second

⁹¹ Gause (1994), 43.

⁹² Ibid.

political consequence was the ability to provide expansive welfare packages directly to citizens, including free education, health care, housing, consumer goods and services. As discussed in the section above, the aim of these benefits was to replace the tribe with the state, and gain political loyalty.⁹³ Hence, the rentier economy greatly weakened traditional groups and perhaps by implication, the social infrastructures which originally bound them together.⁹⁴ Lastly, vast oil income allowed the Gulf ruling families to install large bureaucratic apparatuses in the civil and military arenas. With trusted family members and friends in key positions, these apparatuses were built to serve the monarchs' best interests. Providing government jobs for citizens is another form of patronage, and also equips the government with more power to direct citizens in overseeing the functions of the bureaucracy. Overall, use of the oil wealth by the Gulf monarchies has cemented the political authority of the royal families to an extent unknown in previous generations. While it is true that the Gulf ruling families had already established methods of control and consolidation before oil, it was the advent of oil revenues that secured their position and reduced their vulnerability to the rise of domestic opposition, quite simply because wealth remained in the hands of the ruling classes rather than the technocrats.

b. The Gulf Cooperation Council

This research addresses the arguments made by Stephen Walt and Scott Cooper on the emergence of the GCC; it presents the reasoning of Eric Peterson on the ideology of the GCC; and it highlights the analysis of Michael Barnett, Gregory Gause and Matteo

⁹³ Gause (1994), 43.

⁹⁴ Mitchell, J. S. (2010). Political and Socioeconomic Transformation in the GCC: Image and Reality. *History Compass*, 8(3), 275–302. 279.

Legrenzi on GCC cooperation efforts. The main arguments surrounding the emergence of the GCC revolve around external and internal security threats, with regard to which this research highlights internal security as the impetus for regional cooperation among the GCC member states. Meanwhile, the ideology behind the creation of the GCC organisation is apparent in the text of the GCC Charter, where it explicitly refers to the notions of Arabism and Islam as key indicators of their intentions in terms of coordination and integration. Finally, an analysis of GCC cooperation efforts in the political, economic and social realms is instrumental in understanding the essence and function of the organisation.

The approach that this research regards as key in understanding the emergence of the GCC is that of Stephen Walt. In his book, *The Origins of Alliances*,⁹⁵ Walt lays out his influential theory of alliances, the balance-of-threat theory, which is based on the ‘balancing’ and ‘bandwagoning’ concepts presented in the earlier work of Kenneth Waltz.⁹⁶ Waltz defines ‘balancing’ and ‘bandwagoning’ as opposites; the former indicates alliance with a state to offset power(s), while the latter is defined as joining with the most powerful state or coalition. Waltz relies on classical neorealism to explain the formation of alliances by referring to the concept of a balance of power, indicating it as the driving force that compels states to form alliances. Walt modifies Waltz’s perspective by substituting the idea of a balance of power with the notion of a balance of threats, where he argues that states form alliances based on the collective threats they face, rather than

⁹⁵ Walt, S. M. (1987). *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁹⁶ Kechichian, J.A. (1985). The Gulf Cooperation Council: Search for security. *Third World Quarterly*, 7(4), 853–881.

merely the total amount of power they confront. Walt calls his approach to alliance formation a “refinement of balance of power theory”.⁹⁷

Walt further asserts that alliances “are most commonly viewed as a response to threats, yet there is sharp disagreement as to what the response will be”.⁹⁸ There are two strategic options that states possess when threatened by another state; the first option is *balancing*, which is explained as the states’ response by forming or “joining alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat.”⁹⁹ The second option is described as *bandwagoning*, which is explained as states being attracted to strength, and most likely to align with the stronger and threatening state, rather than with its weaker opponents. Walt refers to the nature of the threat that states are facing in order to assess whether states show balancing or bandwagoning behaviour. He identifies four factors that influence the level of threat: aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions. In examining the alliance patterns in the Middle East, Walt concludes that in the Arab world, “balancing is far more common than bandwagoning”; and further highlights the GCC as one of the prominent examples of balancing in reaction to a foreign threat.¹⁰⁰ This research, therefore, selects his approach in the analysis of the emergence of the GCC due to its emphasis on the alignment of the GCC states in response to threat, rather than their alignment as a result of common features and characteristics.

⁹⁷ Walt (1987), 263.

⁹⁸ Walt, S. M. (1985). Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power.” *International Security*, 9(4), 3–43. 4.

⁹⁹ Walt (1987), 18.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 270.

Overall, Walt's balance-of-threat theory surrounding the two strategic responses of balancing and bandwagoning is a key concept in the analysis of the emergence of the GCC. It signifies that the six Gulf leaderships established the GCC as a balancing reaction to common internal and external security threats. In an attempt to further develop Walt's theory, scholar Gregory Gause examines the intentions aspect of Walt's four elements of threats.¹⁰¹ Gause argues that the Gulf states overwhelmingly identified ideological and political threats, emanating from abroad, to the internal stability of their ruling regimes as more salient than threats based upon aggregate power, geographic proximity or offensive capabilities. Without disregarding the military threat implicit in the Gulf states' decision to unite, Gause asserts that the Gulf states tend to balance threats. They decide whether the potential threat of military attack from one neighbour in the future is more or less serious than the immediate threat to internal regime security as presented by another opponent that is seeking to destabilise and delegitimise the ruling elite. He thus indicates that the rise of internal threats is more alarming to the Gulf leaderships than a military attack from the outside.¹⁰² This research uses this argument in its hypothesis, asserting that the GCC alliance resembles an interdependent arrangement by the Gulf leaderships with the main objective of preserving their regimes. It thus indicates a strong correlation in terms of their capacity for regime preservation among the Gulf monarchs during the Arab Spring, and their ability to manipulate their regional alliance, the GCC.

¹⁰¹ Gause, F. (2003). Balancing What? Threat Perception And Alliance Choice In The Gulf. *Security Studies*, 13(2), 273–305. 274.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Another influential perspective on the emergence of the GCC is that of Scott Cooper.¹⁰³ Cooper regards the GCC as a hybrid organisation that integrates both economic and security perspectives. He describes the GCC as a complicated regional endeavour involving cooperation in external and internal security, foreign policy, trade, and finance. Based on Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory, Cooper further develops the concept of balancing behaviour in an interpretative case study of the GCC. He begins by focusing on the role of the state in each country as the intermediary between domestic society and the international system. He indicates that realists have long emphasised external security threats to the state, while he argues that, especially in the Third World, internal or domestic security threats are as serious as external threats to the state, and may be more serious in some circumstances. Hence, in modification of Walt's theory, Cooper argues that by focusing on the state, alliance behaviour should reflect both external and internal threats; he calls his theory the state-centric balance-of-power theory. His theory distinguishes his argument from other approaches that focus on nation states as unitary actors, and allows the examination of state–society relations in addition to interstate relations.

*Alliances and internal mobilization are well-known outcomes of increasing threats to the state, but we should remember that threatened states might also respond with domestic political reforms, domestic repression, new foreign policy initiatives,...or a host of other creative measures to protect the state's political integrity.*¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Cooper, S. (2003). State-Centric Balance-Of-Threat Theory: Explaining The Misunderstood Gulf Cooperation Council. *Security Studies*, 13(2), 309.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

This research builds on Cooper's perspective on alliance behaviour by identifying the response of threatened states with tactics such as using police force and heightening internal security.

Applying the state-centric balance-of-threat theory to the GCC, Cooper reinforces earlier scholarly work that identifies the GCC as a function of rising internal threat posed by Shi'a minorities to the GCC ruling Sunni monarchies. Other scholars have provided the corroboration that this threat dramatically intensified between the start of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the establishment of the GCC in 1981, as the Iranian Republic specifically targeted the Shi'a population in the Gulf monarchies. Cooper bases his assumption on these past evaluations that the dual economic/political nature of the GCC is best explained by the nature of the domestic threat facing the GCC states. He asserts:

*Once we understand the essentially domestic nature of the threat to GCC states, we understand the choice of issue areas for cooperation.*¹⁰⁵

Thus, Cooper concludes that the key to understanding the emergence of the GCC is that the greatest threat to its members was neither the spillover from the Iran–Iraq war nor direct Iranian invasion, but the spread of internal unrest. He indicates that the state-centric analysis works better than the balance-of-threat theory in explaining the emergence of the GCC because by examining the internal threats to the states, one may explain both the timing and nature of the GCC. Meanwhile, the traditional balance-of-threat theory explains the timing of the origin of the GCC, but mischaracterises the organisation as primarily an external alliance.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 310.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

This research capitalises on Cooper's theory highlighting internal threats as key elements in the emergence of the GCC. As the Gulf leaderships struggled to unify their stance on the region's sudden political changes during the Arab Spring,¹⁰⁷ their main sense of threat was how these changes might affect their domestic spheres and their legitimacy as rulers. The spread of political dissent during the Arab Spring led to the strengthening of unity among the GCC member states and further prompted the utilisation of tactics under the GCC strategy for regime preservation: enhancing legitimacy, heightening security and collaborating in a defence scheme. These tactics are also based on other research conducted by Cooper, predating his recent work, as laid out in an article he wrote with Brock Taylor.¹⁰⁸ In this work, the authors assert that internal security cooperation is just as important as external security cooperation in the formation of the GCC. They further present three mechanisms within the internal security and economic fields that have enabled the GCC member states to retain their domestic stability, under these headings: increased legitimacy; intelligence sharing; and economic benefits.¹⁰⁹ This research applies these mechanisms within its case study, which highlights a number of common mechanisms utilised by the Gulf leaderships in order to address their domestic political dissent during the Arab Spring.

This research's hypothesis argues that the Gulf monarchies utilised the GCC as a vehicle in preserving their regimes during the Arab Spring. Hence, it is crucial to present

¹⁰⁷ These political changes refer to the regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen within the year 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Cooper, S. & Taylor, B. (2003). Power and Regionalism: Explaining Regional Cooperation in the Persian Gulf. In Laursen, F. *Comparative regional integration: theoretical perspectives*. Essay. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Eric Peterson's deep understanding of the ideology and objectives of the GCC. Peterson argues that the theoretical foundation of the GCC on unity and cooperation among its member states is based on the concept of 'Arabism'. The framework of 'Arabism' came to the fore politically in the early 20th century:

*The beginnings of a collective Arab consciousness have been traced to the pre-Islamic period in the Arabian Peninsula, when loose sociocultural ties among the Arab tribes were bolstered as a result of attempts at domination of the region by both the Persians and the Byzantines.*¹¹⁰

Due to the threat of domination by outside forces, Arab political consciousness was established as a necessary response to such threats and as a "distinct and evolving recognition of commonalities".¹¹¹

From its inception, Islam has had an unparalleled effect on the emergence of Arabism. The Islamic movement was spread in Arabic, and "therefore served to unifying its adherents linguistically and socioculturally".¹¹² Another important effect of Islam on Arabism was the substantive direction and purpose it provided, which "expressed a comprehensive Arab spirit".¹¹³ Islam provided the vital concept of the Islamic *umma* or nation, as well as the "standardization of perceptions, philosophies, and social conduct that served to bind further its adherents to a common identity and purpose".¹¹⁴ However, it would be wrong to assume that all Arabs will follow the ideological beliefs of Arabism

¹¹⁰ Peterson (1988), 87.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 88.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

or Islam, mainly because of the diverse circumstances in which each Arab state has emerged, including the varying extent of foreign power influence. As traditional monarchies took shape in the Arabian Peninsula during the mid-20th century, more radical movements manifested themselves in the concept of Arab nationalism in the broader Arab region. Ideological contradictions emerged between the conservative political systems of monarchies in the Gulf and the more socialist movements of Nasserism in Egypt and the Ba'ath factions in Iraq and Syria. Regardless, the representatives of all these Arab states continued to aim for the common goal of broader Arab unification.¹¹⁵

The notion of Arabism was strongly manifested in the formation of the GCC; however, it did not represent an experiment in unity based on any Gulf-specific ideological movements or even pan-Arab political predispositions. “Rather, though it was rooted in the historical quest for unity and designed among other things to promote broader inter-Arab cooperation, the GCC framework was primarily nonideological in nature.”¹¹⁶ The GCC Charter states that the GCC system is “based on the conviction that coordination, cooperation and integration between [the member states] serve the higher goals of the Arab Nation” and that the organisation was intended to “reinforce and serve Arab and Islamic causes”.¹¹⁷ These passages clearly indicate that the organisation was created as a complement to rather than a substitute for the effort to institute a unified pan-Arab framework.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 94.

¹¹⁷ The GCC Charter

Apart from the structural predispositions within the GCC framework in promoting greater Arab unity, clear differences exist between the GCC and other Arab efforts at cooperation.¹¹⁸ Peterson ascribes three characteristics to the GCC framework. First, the GCC is not rooted in ideology: “it is not another misguided effort at realizing Arab nationalism or another past experience choked because they tried to swallow more than they could digest.”¹¹⁹ Rather, the GCC states are guided by practicality and a clear definition of mutual interests and objectives when it comes to their alliance. A second characteristic is the “overriding pragmatism and deliberate nature that has characterized the organization from its inception.”¹²⁰ Peterson argues that this aspect of pragmatism is evident not only in the GCC structure and procedures, but also in its emerging political, economic, social, and defence and security cooperation. Its approach is incremental, rather than absolutist, where it allows for the gradual and deliberate development of a broad foundation to promote further integration. A third characteristic presented by Peterson is that while “the Iran–Iraq war served as a catalyst in the formation of the GCC, it is also evident that the breadth of GCC mutual interests is far larger than only the defence sphere.”¹²¹ The GCC member states could and have substantially benefited from collective activity in the political, diplomatic, and economic realms.

In the realm of political and social coordination, Michael Barnett and Gregory Gause also argue that while the Gulf leaderships established the GCC for statist purposes, the unintended consequence of its existence was the provision of greater mutual

¹¹⁸ The Arab League, the United Arab Republic (UAR), etc.

¹¹⁹ Peterson (1988), 95.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

identification at the societal level. They highlight the role of the GCC in the creation of a Gulf (*khaliji*) identity, where they claim that increasing numbers of citizens in the GCC see themselves as having common interests and a common identity.¹²² They attribute this identity phenomenon to the growth of regional functional organisations and the political vocabulary of Gulf citizens. The notion of a Gulf identity was implicit in the establishment of the GCC, given that the Gulf leaders, for symbolic and strategic purposes, introduced it during the 1980s as a way to offer a rival identity to secular Arab nationalism (promoted by Iraq) and political Islamism (promoted by Iran).¹²³ The fostering of a Gulf identity was thus a means to produce security for the GCC states. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait further facilitated the rise of a distinct Gulf identity throughout the region.

The Gulf identity was promoted by the GCC organisation throughout its Charter and official statements, where the GCC member states repeatedly stressed the historical, tribal, and cultural factors among the Gulf monarchies. An example is apparent in a working GCC paper established in May 1981 which stated: “The emergence of the council for cooperation among the Gulf states is in response to the historical, social, cultural, political and strategic reality through which the Gulf region passed and is passing.”¹²⁴ These statements were meant to differentiate Gulf citizens from the wider Arab community.¹²⁵ The creation of a unique Gulf identity later enabled the Gulf leaderships to disaffiliate with the Arab regimes that fell during the Arab Spring; they

¹²² Barnett, M. & Gause, F.G. (1998). Caravans in opposite directions: society, state and the development of a community in the Gulf Cooperation Council. *Security Communities*, 162.

¹²³ Ibid, 170.

¹²⁴ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 29.

¹²⁵ Barnett and Gause (1998), 171.

quickly highlighted the difference in the political, economic, social and cultural aspects between the monarchical regimes and the authoritarian republics in the Arab world. In an interview in March 2011, the Secretary-General of the GCC at the time, Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah, highlighted the disparity in the level of political and economic development in the Arab region. He indicated that while the GCC member states have experienced “plenty of political and economic development ... [yet] they still need to do more.”¹²⁶ Clearly, the Gulf identity is a political and instrumental creation aimed at enhancing the stability of the GCC regimes. The revival of the Gulf identity during the Arab Spring ultimately secured these regimes; it further enabled the GCC leaders to interfere in fellow GCC members’ domestic affairs under the pretext of a ‘Gulf brotherhood’. An example of such interference is the case of Bahrain, where the PSF entered the country to maintain its stability during the Arab Spring.¹²⁷

Ultimately, Barnett and Gause draw an analogy of the story of the GCC as one of two caravans travelling in opposite directions: at the state level, the six regimes have made some modest moves towards a deepening of cooperation, however seemingly blocked by mistrust and suspicion. At the societal level, on the other hand, there have been considerable developments that suggest a sustained and deepened cooperation and a sense of collective identity. They argue that what began as a symbolic organisation

¹²⁶ *Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research*. (2011). Media Interview with Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah.

¹²⁷ Colombo, S. (2012). The GCC Countries and the Arab Spring: Between Outreach, Patronage and Repression. Working paper. *Instituto Affari Internazionali*.

became something more substantial at the level of interstate and transnational cooperation.¹²⁸

On the achievements and failures of cooperation efforts among the six GCC member states, Matteo Legrenzi asserts that the GCC is the most resilient sub-regional organisation in the Arab world. He argues that since its establishment, the GCC has achieved several results in enhancing the level of cooperation among its member states. However, he points out that the organisation falls short of the goals set out in its founding charter. He states: “I will submit that, from its onset, the GCC was not created to serve a regional institutional purpose, but rather, was deliberately made hollow and served primarily to project a semblance of unity.”¹²⁹ This is due to the fear of the smaller member states of “the interdependence that such an institution was ostensibly designed to promote”.¹³⁰ Legrenzi emphasises the high level of cooperation achieved in the field of internal security, which he argues is strictly linked to the issue of regime survival. The collaboration in the realm of internal security is conducted mostly at the bilateral level and in an informal matter; meaning, the GCC Secretariat is largely excluded from dealing with internal security matters. At the most, it plays a liaison role between the member states.

Legrenzi gives two main reasons why the GCC Secretariat plays only a minor role in internal security matters: first, “no one in the security apparatuses of the member states

¹²⁸ These ideas are supported by more recent publications, specifically by Partrick, N. (2009). *Nationalism in the Gulf States. Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States*. London School of Economics and Political Science.

¹²⁹ Legrenzi (2011), 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

wants to expose the technocrats of the Secretariat to the fairly brutal business of intelligence.”¹³¹ Second, “the plotter in one country could well be the relative of the ruler of another country.”¹³² In more general terms, the GCC member states have failed to create common expectations concerning non-interference in each other’s domestic politics. He gives an example of when GCC rulers in Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia gave hospitality to Sheikh Khalifa Al-Thani, who was deposed by his son, Sheikh Hamad of Qatar in the summer of 1995. As a reaction to the GCC’s support for his father, Sheikh Hamad refused to participate in joint GCC military exercises that were planned for March 1996. Hence, a main obstacle to deepening cooperation was “the recrudescence of fear among some of the ruling elites that their GCC neighbours were working against them in their own domestic politics”.¹³³ Legrenzi goes on to point out that while the GCC monarchies can collaborate swiftly when faced with a threat emanating from an external actor, there will always be an underlying sense that old rivalries could re-emerge quickly when an external threat is not looming.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, this introductory chapter presented the main objectives of this research, and highlighted its hypothesis, justification of the case study and methodology. It presented a literature review that focused on the sources of legitimacy that have enabled the sustainability of the Gulf monarchies, and focused on the academic analysis of the

¹³¹ Ibid, 79.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Barnett and Gause (1998), 191.

emergence of the GCC organisation. In highlighting the main sources of legitimacy, this chapter assessed the role of the British Empire as a crucial element in the transformation of the ruling tribes into the current Gulf regimes, where the British shaped and restructured traditional perceptions in order to serve their interests in the region.¹³⁴ This chapter has further expanded on the incorporation of traditional politics within the notion of modern nation-states that led to the establishment of a unique political structure that combines old and new approaches to governance. This unique approach represents the core of the Gulf political environment, where the practices of tribalism and Islam play a crucial role in the Gulf rulers' ability to acquire loyalty and legitimacy among their populations. Meanwhile, the distribution of oil wealth revenues secured the newly established political systems by demonstrating that the Gulf rulers were and still are intent on sharing the oil wealth with their population. The oil wealth revenues provided the Gulf rulers with the monetary capacity to control the economy, as well as providing a convenient bargaining tool in accumulating political loyalty.¹³⁵

The significance of examining the academic analysis of the GCC in the literature review lies in gaining an understanding, in the chapters following, of the main objectives of the GCC and how the Gulf monarchies have utilised the organisation as a vehicle in preserving their regimes. This research indicates that the greatest threat to the GCC monarchies is the spread of domestic dissent, and argues that the key motivation behind the alliance is the preservation of the six ruling Gulf families. Accordingly, as the main purpose of the GCC organisation, the preservation of the monarchies acts as a basis for

¹³⁴ Kamrava (2011), 3.

¹³⁵ Gause (1994), 75.

cooperation in each sphere, whether political, economic or security. It is through this perspective that the research presents the role of the GCC in the survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring.

Chapter One

The Gulf Cooperation Council and its Member States: A Regional Framework (1979–2011)

I. Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established during turbulent events in the region; the Iranian republic was threatening the GCC states with its expansionist ideologies and the Iraq–Iran war had been going on for almost a year. An analysis of the behaviour of the GCC countries in the face of these previous internal and external threats is key to understanding the GCC countries’ response to the Arab Spring that occurred three decades later. This chapter aims to present the regional framework of the GCC and its member states; it begins by presenting an analysis on the two main events that altered the Gulf regional structure: the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War that began in 1980. It further presents the main goals, organisational structure and cooperation efforts of the GCC during its first phase of existence (1981–1989). During this phase, the GCC states endured the spillover of the war and faced numerous terrorist attacks within their borders. The second part of this chapter examines the GCC states during the post-Cold War period; it first describes the events that led to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and analyses the GCC states’ response to the Gulf War in 1991. It provides an understanding of GCC security frameworks before the war and after, and

demonstrates how the GCC states' decision to rely on Western military forces changed the regional framework in the Arab world. It continues to analyse the impact of the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the subsequent US war in Iraq in 2003 on the GCC countries' internal and external security. Finally, this chapter presents a summary of the Arab Spring demonstrations that occurred in 2011–2012 in the GCC states of Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia. This research's case study focuses on Kuwait, the GCC, and the Arab Spring and indicates that the threat of the Arab Spring demonstrations prompted the Kuwaiti leadership to strengthen its alliance in the GCC in order to preserve its regime. This chapter thus provides a summary of Arab Spring events in other GCC states as a comparative analysis to the case study and shows how the GCC was also utilised by these Gulf leaderships as a vehicle in preserving their regimes.

The main goal of this chapter is to indicate that an analysis of the GCC countries' reactions to previous threats sheds light on the expected behaviour of the GCC monarchies confronting the threats of the Arab Spring. In past responses to internal and external threats, the GCC monarchies strengthened their unity under the auspices of their regional alliance; they did that by aligning their foreign policies and military goals. However, as they experienced common challenges they continued to pursue an individualistic approach to their domestic affairs, with the exception of Bahrain. Their reliance on Western military power in recent decades indicates a fear of domination or interference by fellow Arab countries, including fellow GCC members. Hence, the GCC monarchies' response to past external threats resembles a pseudo-united front involving disengaged members that rely on foreign military powers to protect their borders. However, the response to internal threats has varied throughout the decades, with genuine

reliance on one another's military capabilities (i.e. the sharing of intelligence) and the utilisation of a cultural 'Gulf identity' that unites the GCC monarchies on a subregional level. Overall, the analysis of past experiences of the GCC monarchies' behaviour towards internal and external threats helps better to understand the leaderships' reaction to the threats of the Arab Spring. As expected, the GCC monarchies announced a united front; however, the internal challenges of the Arab Spring prompted a deeper exigency to align their domestic policies and emulate one another's tactics in order to preserve their regimes.

II. The Emergence of the Gulf Regional Structure (1979-1989)

In the decade before the establishment of the GCC in 1981, the six Gulf monarchies underwent a significant transformation period within their respective economic, political and even social and cultural fields. The 1970s was an era of modernisation, technology, independence, and construction during which the Gulf leaderships were transforming their desert towns into modernised cities, and developing their predominately rural communities into urbanised societies. It was the era when hospitals, schools, ministries, and highways were first established in the Gulf monarchies. There are four events that represent the crucial turning points during this era: the British withdrawal from the region in 1971, the increase in oil prices in 1973, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iran–Iraq war in 1980.¹³⁶ These events generated various security, political and economic challenges, and opportunities resulting in closer relations among the six Gulf monarchies

¹³⁶ Abdulla, A. K. (2010). "Contemporary Socio-Political Issues of the Arab Gulf Moment." (Research paper). Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance, and Globalization in the Gulf States, London School of Economics and Political Science. 7.

which ultimately led to the emergence of the GCC. The British withdrawal in 1971 completely altered the political dynamics of the region by creating an instant power vacuum that intensified the issue of security among the smaller Gulf monarchies. Meanwhile, the increase in oil prices in 1973 provided a vast flow of oil wealth that was poured into developing the infrastructure of these states, prompting new challenges like the influx of expatriates and foreign workers. Oil wealth also enabled the establishment of an extensive welfare system that was mobilised by the Gulf ruling elites in further legitimising their rule. The rise and success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 presented severe internal and external threats to the Gulf monarchies. And the Iran–Iraq war in 1980 posed as an international and regional security challenge detrimental to the survival of the GCC monarchies.

a. The Iranian Revolution (1979-1980)

The Iranian Revolution is considered one of the major political turning points in the history of the Gulf region. It led to the overthrow of the pro-Western Shah of Iran and replaced the Iranian monarchy with an Islamic republic. Iran's new revolutionary government was led by Islamic clerics who aimed to establish an Islamic government that would enforce Islamic law and conduct domestic and foreign affairs in accordance with Islamic standards.¹³⁷ Eager to export their revolution, the Islamic clerics embraced expansionist ideologies that included targeting “socioeconomic cleavages in the smaller and militarily weaker Gulf states in order to undermine social cohesiveness, religious

¹³⁷ Khadduri, M. (1988). *The Gulf War: The Origins and Implications of the Iraq-Iran Conflict*. New York: Oxford University Press. 118.

unity, and above all, the states' Islamic legitimacy.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, the Revolution represented a profound threat in its plans to rid the region of the monarchical system, leading to a common security concern that compelled the Gulf leaders to create a joint security scheme under a regional organisation, the GCC.

The first Secretary-General of the GCC, Abdulla Bishara, stated that the Iranian quest for supremacy in the Gulf was the main source of threat to the stability of the GCC states.¹³⁹ The Iranian Revolution not only demolished America's Twin Pillar policy, it induced a new global crisis where oil prices nearly doubled between 1978 and 1980. It led directly to the Iran–Iraq war, which further divided the political structures of the region, pitting the Islamic Iranian regime against the Ba'athist Iraqi regime with the support of the Gulf monarchical states. Finally, it altered the regional alignments that were developed in the previous decade, indirectly causing the Gulf monarchies to reach out for Western support, and in particular bringing about an increased American presence in the region.

As a result of this vulnerability, the six Gulf foreign ministers met in Riyadh in February 1981 to discuss a regional organisation that would bring “stability to their peoples”. After more than a week of deliberation, the ministers reached a decision to establish the Gulf Cooperation Council; a charter was issued on May 25, and a working paper was issued the next day to provide a formal justification for the organisation – “the preservation of stability”. The document further stated:

¹³⁸ Cooper, S. (2003). *State-Centric Balance-Of-Threat Theory: Explaining The Misunderstood Gulf Cooperation Council*. Security Studies, 13(2), 306–349. 327.

¹³⁹ Dietl, G. (1991). *Through Two Wars and Behind: A Study of the Gulf Cooperation Council*. New Delhi: Lancers Books. 60.

*International designs will not be able to find a foothold in a merged region which has one voice, opinion, and strength. However, they will be able to find a thousand footholds if this region, which is rich in oil and men, remains made up of small entities that can easily be victimized.*¹⁴⁰

The Gulf monarchies were particularly concerned at the substantial number of Shi'a Muslim residents and citizens among their populations. Iranians are overwhelmingly Shi'a,¹⁴¹ and in the Gulf monarchies the Shi'a represent a minority of the total population, yet, an important component with sizeable Shi'a communities in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.¹⁴² In Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Shi'a are concentrated in the oil-rich Hasa province, where they constitute a majority of the population.

¹⁴⁰ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 29.

¹⁴¹ "According to early 1980s estimates, Shiites constituted 92% of the total Iranian population and 95% of the citizen population." In Cooper (2010), 327.

¹⁴² Figures on ethnic breakdown are notoriously unreliable in the Gulf region, to which any statistic given should be treated with caution. There are other scholarly sources that suggest Oman's Shi'a minority comprises as much as 15–20% of the population. In Cooper (2003), 327.

Table 2: Percentage of Shi’a citizens in the Gulf (as of 2013)¹⁴³

Country	Shi’a as percentage of citizens
Saudi Arabia	10–15
Kuwait	20–30
Bahrain	60–70
Qatar	10
Oman	10
UAE	10–15

Note: No official statistics distinguish between Sunni and Shi’a when estimating the number of Muslims in the Gulf countries. These are estimates for the Shi’a population in the states with access to the Gulf, based on the available literature and fieldwork across the Gulf.

Despite the significant number of Shi’a across the Gulf, five out of six Gulf monarchies are ruled by Sunni leaders, “whose attitudes toward Shi’ism vary from cold indifference to acute hostility”.¹⁴⁴ (Oman is the only GCC country that is not ruled by a Sunni leader; Qaboos bin Sa’id is Ibadi). Saudi Arabia’s religious establishment is particularly hostile to the Saudi Shi’a population, where they are denied basic economic and religious freedoms. The Saudi oil industry is based in Shi’a territory, where Shi’a contribute the bulk of the workforce; and the majority of the Shi’a did not benefit from the economic, educational or social opportunities provided by the oil wealth. They were banned from certain professions, such as working in military and educational institutions.

¹⁴³ Matthiesen, T. (2013). *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn’t*. California: Stanford University Press.

¹⁴⁴ Cooper (2003), 327.

They were also banned from performing a Shi'a ritual called *Ashura* in public and from building their own Shi'a mosques.¹⁴⁵ The Bahraini Shi'a also consider themselves “economically and politically disadvantaged second-class citizens”,¹⁴⁶ where they are virtually excluded from the Bahraini army and interior ministry, and face a high rate of unemployment. Within these economically, politically, and socially unstable conditions, the Iranian Revolution accentuated the problems and the Iranian clerics were able to effectively exert their political and religious influence on the Shi'a populations, prompting political opposition to the Gulf monarchies. “By playing upon the religious loyalties of poor Shiite populations in Gulf countries, Iranian clerics seriously threatened domestic stability within Gulf states.”¹⁴⁷

A prime example of the Iranian Revolution's influence on the internal dynamics of the Gulf monarchies occurred in November 1979, when a Sunni Muslim fundamentalist group threatened the stability of the Al Saud regime by seizing the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Even though the incident was void of Iranian involvement, the fact that an Islamic rebellion challenged the Saudi monarchy was alarming to all the Gulf states. Furthermore, inspired by the Iranian example, indigenous Saudi Shi'a groups began rebelling in late 1979 and again in February 1980.¹⁴⁸ A major demonstration by the Saudi Shi'a came during the Shi'a ritual of *Ashura* to mourn the death of their martyrs, Hassan and Hussein, a practice forbidden by the Saudi state. In the following year, 1980, the Saudi Shi'a organised a larger demonstration and a series of strikes in Qatif, an eastern

¹⁴⁵ Al-Rasheed, M. (2002). *A History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 141.

¹⁴⁶ Cooper (2003), 327.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 7.

province of Saudi Arabia, to voice their discontent over their status as second-class citizens.¹⁴⁹ The Saudi government blamed Iranian clerics for distributing “seditious literature” to pilgrims, leading to the deportation of many Iranians from Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁰

So, the Iranian Revolution influenced the internal stability of Saudi Arabia: “... By targeting Saudi Arabia’s oppressed Shiite minority, Iranian clerics disrupted domestic tranquillity in Saudi Arabia and threatened the political and religious legitimacy of the state.”¹⁵¹ The Grand Mosque attack and the demonstrations led by Saudi Shi’a were perceived by the Gulf rulers as a response to the calls made by Iran’s revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, for a general uprising of fundamentalist Muslims in the region. It thus prompted the Saudi monarchy to take the leadership role in securing the region against the threat of the Revolution.

The Bahraini monarchy was also highly affected by the Iranian Revolution, where it experienced Shi’a upheavals in 1979 and 1980, and an attempted coup d’état by a pro-Iranian Shi’a group in 1982.¹⁵² In January of 1982, the Bahraini government reportedly asserted that “the Iranian regime’s threat is embodied in its expansionist policy of sabotage against the Arab Gulf states and in its attempt to incite and sow sedition”.¹⁵³ The Bahraini Prime Minister stated in an interview that the Iranian regime was exploiting the Shi’a in Bahrain and the Gulf, encouraging political ties with the ruling ayatollahs in

¹⁴⁹ Al-Rasheed, M. (1998). “The Shi’a of Saudi Arabia: A minority in search of cultural authenticity.” *British Journal Of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 121–138.

¹⁵⁰ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 7.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Amin (1984), 12.

¹⁵³ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 34.

Tehran, and training them in the use of weapons and acts of sabotage to ferment chaos and threaten security.¹⁵⁴ Three decades later, this line of argument is still being used by the Bahraini ruling elites against any form of political dissent within their population.

The rising threat from Iran was primarily internal to the smaller Gulf states due to the significant number of Shi'a citizens and Iranian Shi'a residents among their populations. Iran's new revolutionary regime under Ayatollah Khomeini was emanating a militant Shi'a rhetoric that openly denounced the monarchical and imperial form of governments by the Gulf rulers as having no place in Islam.¹⁵⁵ The Kuwaiti monarchy experienced a series of violent attacks directly connected to Iran throughout the 1980s. In 1983, there were in multiple bomb attacks at the American and French embassies in Kuwait.¹⁵⁶ The Iraqi Islamic Dawa Party, a group of Shi'a Islamists, claimed responsibility for the bombings and publically supported the Iranian Republic.¹⁵⁷ Further assaults on Kuwait's security included the hijacking of a Kuwaiti plane in December 1984 by group of Shi'a terrorist, resulting in the death of two Americans. The newly established GCC organisation strongly denounced the bombings and affirmed its support for its Kuwaiti member in facing such "criminal acts".¹⁵⁸ It condemned all violent acts and asserted that "such vile actions will only make Kuwait and its sister GCC states strong and more

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Priess, D. (1996). "Balance-of-threat Theory and the Genesis of the Gulf Cooperation Council: An interpretative case study." *Security Studies*, 5(4), 143–171.

¹⁵⁶ Levitt, M. (2012). 29 Years Later, Echoes of 'Kuwait17'. *The Washington Institute*.

¹⁵⁷ *The New York Times*. (2007). Iraqi lawmaker was convicted in 1983 bombings in Kuwait that killed 5.

¹⁵⁸ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 36.

solid”.¹⁵⁹ Overall, the Iranian Revolution generated internal threats rather than external, military, threats within the Gulf monarchies. The start of the Iran–Iraq war further intensified these threats, and culminated in the necessity of establishing a regional organisation that would unite the six Gulf monarchies, the GCC.

b. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

The Iran–Iraq war began on September 23, 1980 when Iraqi forces invaded Iran. The issue of supremacy over the Shatt Al-Arab waterway was a primary cause of the war.¹⁶⁰ In 1975, Iran and Iraq had signed an agreement where Iraq recognised Iranian sovereignty over half of the Shatt Al-Arab waterway. The Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, claimed that his reason for invading Iran in 1980 was defensive: “to compel the revolutionary Islamic regime in Iran to cease support for subversion in Iraq and attempts to overthrow the regime”.¹⁶¹ However, there were more opportunist motives behind his invasion, where the collapse of the Shah’s regime in Iran had provided an opportunity for the Iraqi president to reverse the 1975 agreement on the Shatt Al-Arab waterway and possibly “liberate” Iran’s Khuzestan Province that borders Iraq’s Basra region and is largely inhabited by ethnic Arabs.¹⁶² The Iraqi regime claimed that it was not only

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 37.

¹⁶⁰ Khadduri (1988), 120.

¹⁶¹ Long, D. E., Reich, B. & Gasiorowski, M. J. (2010). *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*. Boulder, CO: Westview. 100.

¹⁶² Ibid.

defending its territorial integrity, but the integrity of Arab lands as a whole from impending Persian dominance.¹⁶³

The outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War in September 1980 accelerated the coordination process that was already taking place between the six Gulf states. The war proved to be a catalyst for two reasons: on the one hand it temporarily excluded Iran and Iraq from a joint Gulf enterprise, “thus enabling the six monarchies to concentrate on their common ground without having to defer to the pressures and enticements of their bigger Gulf brothers.”¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, the war highlighted the common threats facing the six Gulf monarchies, and prompted them to overlook their differences and join forces. Saddam’s reaction to the establishment of the GCC was documented in an interview with an Arabic daily newspaper. He stated: “It is not proper that Iraq who fights Iran on your behalf should not be included at the emerging Gulf grouping. It will be obvious to everyone that Iraq has been excluded deliberately.”¹⁶⁵ The GCC ignored Iraqi pleas to join the organisation, and continued to consolidate its structure.

During the first two years of the war, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE provided Iraq with nearly \$30 billion in grants and loans. From 1982 onwards, the direct military aid to Iraq stopped, and instead, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia agreed to produce Iraq’s quota of 1.2 million barrels of oil per day on its behalf and transfer the proceeds to Baghdad.

The Iran–Iraq war proceeded to spill over to neighbouring GCC states; the most severe and immediate effect of the conflict on the security of the GCC states being the

¹⁶³ Khadduri (1988), 120.

¹⁶⁴ Guazzone, L. (1988). “Gulf Co-operation Council: The security policies.” *Survival*, 30(2), 134–148.

¹⁶⁵ Dietl (1991), 60.

promotion by Iran of subversive activities in the member countries. “Such acts have taken either the form of highly visible public disruptions, including attacks on public leaders or symbolic targets, or strikes on economic or other critical installations.”¹⁶⁶ Iranian attacks on Kuwait occurred repeatedly in 1987, and included missile strikes on Kuwaiti oil facilities and ships. Ongoing strikes on Kuwaiti shipping prompted Kuwait to seek the assistance of the superpowers in late 1986 to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf.¹⁶⁷ In December 1986, the United States offered to protect Kuwaiti ships by reflagging them with an American flag.¹⁶⁸

The Gulf monarchies’ security-based response to the war can be divided into three categories: diplomacy, military build-up, and a combination of both.¹⁶⁹ Oman strongly advocated military preparedness; it perceived the Iranian Revolution as not only a threat to the Gulf region, but also a pretext for Soviet intervention if the Islamic Republic was replaced by a communist regime. However, most of the Gulf monarchies opted for a less threatening response: at the beginning of the war, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE opted for diplomacy, where each monarchy embarked on individual diplomatic initiatives that would lead to a truce between Iran and Iraq. The Gulf leaders attempted a diplomatic approach with the Iranian government, where they aimed to mediate between the warring countries. On May 16, 1983 the Kuwaiti and Emirati Foreign Affairs Ministers visited both Iran and Iraq to discuss ways of ending the conflict. However, the Gulf monarchies’

¹⁶⁶ Peterson (1988), 184.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 127.

¹⁶⁸ Legrenzi, M. (2011). *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economic Coordination in a Changing Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris. 91.

¹⁶⁹ Khadduri (1988), 123.

efforts towards rapprochement failed, and the Iranian Republic continued its negative propaganda against the Saudi regime and its Gulf neighbours, leading the Gulf leaders' to lend their full support to Iraq.¹⁷⁰

Another response by the Gulf monarchies to the Iran–Iraq war was a combination of diplomacy on the one hand and military strength on the other, a position that was led by Saudi Arabia. With the prolongation of the war, other Gulf monarchies began to follow Saudi's position, which became known as the Saudi policy of reliance on diplomacy augmented by military backup.¹⁷¹ Accordingly, in support of this policy, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE sought bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia in February 1982, while Kuwait and Oman did not seek formal agreements. The security agreements provided for the exchange of equipment, expertise, and training and for extradition of criminals and border cooperation.¹⁷² The GCC monarchies did not sign a unilateral agreement; however, they all followed a policy of military build-up and “a definite policy ... of diversifying arms-supplying countries to the extent possible so that the obstacle of reliance may be minimized”.¹⁷³ The decision by the GCC monarchies with a long-established supplier relationship with the United States to diversify their weaponry sources was an indication of their determination to limit the perception of their political exposure to Washington.¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the United States played a prominent role as an arms supplier to the GCC states by providing over 37% of military systems development

¹⁷⁰ Hiro, D. (1991). *The Longest War: the Iran-Iraq military conflict*. New York: Routledge. 76.

¹⁷¹ Khadduri (1988), 126.

¹⁷² Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 34.

¹⁷³ Peterson (1988), 197.

¹⁷⁴ Due to difficulties arising from the Arab–Israel conflict. In Peterson (1988), 211.

over the years of 1981–1985.¹⁷⁵ Eventually, each monarchy formulated their own defence plan, with Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia strengthening their individual military and intelligence links with the United States.¹⁷⁶

The development of GCC military coordination was majorly influenced by the Iran–Iraq war. “The conflict has been responsible for both impelling and preventing the GCC member states from engaging in ever-closer cooperation.”¹⁷⁷ Albeit the conflict did serve as a catalyst for the formation of the GCC and as a basis for enhanced military cooperation between the GCC member states, the severity of events was such that among the GCC monarchies, provoking Iran by the continued pace of GCC military cooperation was viewed as unnecessary confrontation.¹⁷⁸ This led to a highly uneven pace of military cooperation among GCC members. Furthermore, reliance on the West for security may also have delayed military coordination efforts among the GCC states. The decision by Kuwait to allow a U.S. military escort operation in July 1987, rather than endure continued Iranian intimidation and attacks, was an act of survival by the Gulf monarchy. The heightened presence of the United States in the region was perceived as a necessary measure in response to the political and economic difficulties posed by the continued Iranian strikes on Kuwaiti shipping. “By engaging in direct mediation or encouraging wider international support for an end to the Iran–Iraq war ... the GCC has sought to

¹⁷⁵ Peterson (1988), 197.

¹⁷⁶ Hiro (1991), 78.

¹⁷⁷ Peterson (1988), 210.

¹⁷⁸ Bishara, Abdulla, former Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (1981–1993). 21 Mar. 2012. Kuwait.

realize the predominant objectives set out in its constituent instruments.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, the reliance of the GCC monarchies on the United States for security during the Iran–Iraq war did not contradict the organisation’s formal objectives of greater cooperation efforts in the economic, political, and military realms.

The war ended in July of 1988, and a ceasefire was agreed between the two countries on August 20, 1988. The costs of the war were high for both countries. There were at least 350,000 Iranian casualties and 150,000 Iraqi casualties.¹⁸⁰ Iraq acquired a debt of \$80 billion to pay for the war, half owed to the Gulf monarchies and half to Europe. Within a year and a half of the ceasefire, Iraq was embroiled in regional conflict with Kuwait that would lead to a second Gulf war involving increased U.S. military presence and a coalition of more than thirty countries.¹⁸¹

Overall, both the Iranian Revolution and the Iran–Iraq war “represent supremely compelling reasons for GCC initiatives to effect greater collective political and diplomatic actions, on the one hand, and higher levels of military cooperation, on the other.”¹⁸² The Iran–Iraq war prompted the Gulf states to secure defence pacts and establish a new regional organisation, the GCC, which excluded Iraq and Iran from the Gulf dynamic. Iran directed most of its efforts in subversive activities towards Kuwait and Saudi Arabia due to their financial support of Iraq. Meanwhile, Oman, the UAE, and the smaller GCC states had a more ambivalent position regarding the war and maintained contacts with Iran. As Iran attempted to divide the six GCC member states by singling

¹⁷⁹ Peterson (1988), 137.

¹⁸⁰ Legrenzi (2011), 92.

¹⁸¹ Long et al. (2010), 100.

¹⁸² Peterson (1988), 96.

out Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as propaganda targets, the “GCC functioned as an umbrella to express a more severe condemnation of Iranian actions”.¹⁸³ From this point of view the GCC proved a useful forum for the six Gulf states throughout the Iran–Iraq war to advance common diplomatic positions in multilateral organisations such as the United Nations, the Arab League and the ICO.

c. The GCC: Main Goals, Organisational Structure and Cooperation Efforts

On May 25, 1981, the six heads of states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) assembled in Abu Dhabi¹⁸⁴ and declared the establishment of their regional organisation, the Gulf Cooperation Council. The basic objective of the GCC was stated in Article 4 of its Charter: “to effect coordination, integration and cooperation between member states in all fields in order to achieve unity among them”.¹⁸⁵ The emergence of the GCC was an instant reaction to the turbulent regional events of the Islamic Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iraq–Iran war in 1980. Due to the external and internal threats generated by these two events, the Gulf monarchies hastily arranged the formation of the organisation, taking less than three months (from February to May of 1981) to unanimously agree on the general ideas, structure and objectives of the GCC before announcing its formal birth.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Legrenzi (2011), 98.

¹⁸⁴ The capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

¹⁸⁵ The GCC Charter.

¹⁸⁶ Abdulla, A. (1999). The Gulf Cooperation Council: Nature Origin, and Process. In Hudson, M. *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration*. New York: Columbia University Press. (Chapter 7). 4.

In terms of an internal perspective on the emergence and purpose of the GCC, the Gulf states were divided on the objectives of their newly-formed alliance. Each Gulf state had varying intentions as to the purpose of the GCC and envisioned very different models of cooperation; three main draft proposals were put forward at the first meeting of the six foreign ministers on February 4, 1981. Kuwait envisioned the emergence of the GCC as mainly an economic institution that would lead to a non-binding Gulf common market, loosely corresponding to the European Community (EC).¹⁸⁷ The Kuwaiti government stressed the importance of ensuing an organisation that takes a position of neutrality in regard to the Cold War. Kuwait was the only Gulf country at the time to have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union; and it sought to place the GCC's principle significance in the areas of economic and social coordination, partly so that the new organisation would not be seen as a military organisation aligned with the United States.¹⁸⁸ It also believed that should the GCC members coordinate their security, it should be confined to the exchange of information, without pursuing a joint military arm. Meanwhile, Oman envisioned the GCC as purely a military alliance between all six states, corresponding to a Gulf version of NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Due to its strategic location in the lower Gulf region, Oman's main concern was the protection of the Straits of Hormuz from threats to freedom of navigation.¹⁸⁹ The Omani proposal openly stressed the importance of military alliance with the United States; and envisioned the creation of a naval taskforce to be drawn from the United States, Britain and West Germany to ensure

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Legrenzi (2011), 31.

¹⁸⁹ The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow and strategically important waterway through which most of the region's oil must pass. It was threatened in the spillover of the Iran-Iraq war.

continued freedom of navigation through the strait. “While the Omani preoccupation with freedom of passage in the Straits of Hormuz was recognized, the focus of the meeting shifted to the threat of domestic uprisings stemming from Iranian calls to ‘export the revolution’ to the Arab sheikhdoms of the Gulf.”¹⁹⁰ The Saudi Arabian proposal was based on internal security priorities due to the threats emanating from revolutionary Iran. It stressed that the main purpose of the GCC was political integration, and that the six Gulf states needed formal cooperation in the realm of internal security and a commitment to military intervention to preserve and restore order and stability. Saudi Arabia’s priority was thus the preservation of its regime and the establishment of an organisation that “would primarily provide its six states a sense of collective security while each individually pursued its own policies and interests”.¹⁹¹ As such, the three proposals reflected very different approaches to the nature of the organisation. Ultimately, all six states emphasised the primacy of cooperation in the economic and social fields, which was reflected in the wording of the organisation’s charter.

On March 9, 1981, the six foreign ministers met again in Muscat to approve the basic structure of the organisation and the draft Charter. The ministers specifically approved three documents that set out the by-laws for the Cooperation Council, the Supreme Council, and the Ministerial Council. They also decided in principle that the first Secretary-General of the GCC would be from Kuwait; this was a decision made in order to “project the idea that the new organisation would steer a neutral course between the

¹⁹⁰ Legrenzi (2011), 30.

¹⁹¹ Abdulla (1999), 4.

two superpowers”.¹⁹² Abdulla Bishara, Kuwait’s then permanent representative at the United Nations, became the first Secretary-General of the GCC. Bishara was behind Kuwait’s draft proposal (mentioned above) and insisted that the organisation’s charter should forego any mention of internal and external security cooperation. He believed that the new organisation needed to project its neutrality in order to survive, and “his view, along with the Kuwaiti version of cooperation, won the day even if the foreign ministers who met ... to finalize plans for the establishment of the GCC did not rule out the adoption of the Omani and Saudi perspectives at a later date.”¹⁹³ Hence, the door was left open for incorporating cooperation objectives in the internal and external security fields, which the member states eventually implemented. The first GCC summit took place on May 25, 1981 in Abu Dhabi. At the second GCC summit in Riyadh in November 1981, the first agreement signed after the nomination of Abdulla Bishara as the first Secretary-General was the Unified Economic Agreement (UEA).¹⁹⁴ The main objective of the UEA is to provide a vehicle for the integration of the member states’ economies into one large regional economy.¹⁹⁵ In order to coordinate and unify their economies, the member states developed ways to encourage the production and transportation of GCC-produced goods; “these goods include all agricultural, animal, industrial and natural resource products.”¹⁹⁶ The UEA also contained specific provisions for the unification of member states’ policies

¹⁹² Legrenzi (2011), 32.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Dargin, J. (2011). *Desert dreams: the quest for Arab integration from the Arab Revolt to the Gulf Cooperation Council*. Dordrecht: Republic of Letters. 258.

¹⁹⁵ Dietl (1991), 212.

¹⁹⁶ Nakhleh (1986), 27.

in other areas that include development, technical cooperation, financial and monetary policy and energy policy. By 1983, the GCC region constituted a customs union by normal economic standards, and in the following three years, steps were taken towards creating a common market economic structure.

In common with most institutional documents in the Gulf region, the GCC Charter is a carefully drawn document that lays down a proper organisational hierarchy and assigns functions and powers to each of its components; however, in practice, the decision-making is highly personalised and ad hoc. The Charter consists of 22 Articles, and is divided into six topics: Basic Information; Structure; Functions of the Main Bodies; Privileges and Immunities; and finally, Charter Implementation, Amendment and Deposition. The first topic covers basic information, such as the name of the organisation and the location of its headquarters: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The names of the six members are definitively listed so as to limit membership to those six states – if any expansion were to happen, it would require an article amendment.¹⁹⁷ The hierarchical nature of the organisation designates a Supreme Council to preside over the structure, composed of the six heads of state, who rotate as president of the organisation on an annual basis. At the second level is the Ministerial Council, which consists of the foreign ministers and is where most of the organisation's joint decisions are reached. A Secretary-General is

¹⁹⁷ Dietl, G. (1991). *Through Two Wars and Behind: A Study of the Gulf Cooperation Council*. New Delhi, India: Lancers Books. 12.

appointed for a renewable three-year term, and six directors supervising 23 departments lead a Secretariat.¹⁹⁸

The GCC framework revolves around the Supreme Council, which possesses the sole decision-making authority on all issues of substance. However, the supporting committees and councils are an integral part of the organisation, especially as concerns the development of the programmes and procedures. The Ministerial Council and the Secretariat General are “the formal vehicles through which broader objectives as elaborated by the Supreme Council are ratified, implemented and monitored”.¹⁹⁹ Due to the decision that resolutions on substantive matters must be unanimous to be carried in the Supreme Council, the ultimate binding decision of the organisation must be based on a consensus as to the common denominator among the member states. Although this may restrict the activities of the Council on contentious issues between the members, it also compels them to reinforce areas of cooperation. Furthermore, even though decisions are based on unanimous votes, in practice the procedures are often take second place to the monarchical personalities in the Supreme Council, leading to a personalised way of generating decisions.²⁰⁰

The GCC Charter engages in lofty and ambiguous terminology such as “unity, integration, cooperation, and coordination”. The objectives as defined in Article Four of the Charter are as follows:²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Al-Musfir, S. (2001). The GCC States: Internal Dynamics and Foreign Policies. In Kechichian, J. (eds.). *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*. New York: Palgrave Press. 315.

¹⁹⁹ Peterson (1988), 115.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ The GCC Charter.

- 1- To achieve cooperation among the member states in all fields as a prelude to unity.
- 2- To strengthen the links of cooperation among the peoples of the member states in different fields.
- 3- To establish similar systems among the member states in all fields, including economics and finance; commerce, customs and communications; education and culture; social welfare and health; information and tourism; and legislation and administration.
- 4- To stimulate scientific and technological progress in the fields of industry, mineralogy, agriculture and marine and animal resources. Also, to establish common projects and encourage cooperation from the private sector for the common good of the peoples of the member states.

As per Bishara's preference, Article 4's objectives did not mention cooperation in the area of security. However, security was and remains the leading factor behind its various activities.²⁰² The issue of security was specifically excluded in the organisation's objectives for three main reasons. First, it attempts to forestall negative responses from the members' powerful neighbours, Iran and Iraq. The GCC leaders did not want to alarm their neighbours by announcing defence cooperation in a new regional bloc that excludes them.²⁰³ Second, downplaying any security role for the GCC was to "allay suspicions in Iran and the Arab world that the organisation was a cover for an alliance with the United States".²⁰⁴ The GCC states collectively asserted their preference for regional

²⁰² Dietl (1991), 12.

²⁰³ Bishara, Abdulla. Former Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (1981-1993). 21 Mar. 2012. Kuwait.

²⁰⁴ Barnett and Gause (1998), 166.

independence and resistance to foreign intervention, even though both the Soviets and the Americans were actively courting the Gulf states. Third, by emphasising economic and cultural integration, the smaller Gulf states ensured their own independence from Saudi dominance. Overall, “rhetoric about economic and cultural cooperation was simply less threatening to outsiders and insiders.”²⁰⁵

The proclaimed structural aim of the GCC as stated in the Charter²⁰⁶ is to achieve a “confederal” union; however, it is not clear to what extent. The envisioned system surpasses the objectives of most regional organisations, as it moves beyond the concept of an association between states.²⁰⁷ The GCC structure is aimed at reinforcing common interests among the member states, and refrains from highlighting any differences that may arise between them. However, a main objective of the GCC is to improve coordination among its members rather than to instigate specific integration schemes that would override the individual sovereignty of each state. The term “confederal” did not, therefore, imply an actual confederacy between member states, but rather a consensus of joint political and economic effort. Abdulla Bishara made a statement to emphasise this approach:

Despite the fact that the GCC Charter does not contain a clear-cut political theory, there is consensus on some form of confederacy between its six member states. Every Arab country is keen to maintain its special characteristics, independence and legislative authorities, while at the same time a strong desire

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ The GCC Charter.

²⁰⁷ Peterson (1988), 101.

*exists among these states to promote their regional potential within one framework. There is common agreement that, acting under the umbrella of the Council, they will be able to pool their political, economic and other efforts in a confederal manner.*²⁰⁸

It is clear from this statement that at the moment of its creation, the GCC did not intend unification to be the eventual outcome. The stated objectives in Article 4 make no reference to an end result, which signifies that their emphasis is on the process of cooperation, rather than the outcome of integration, and on “consensus-building rather than progressive development”.²⁰⁹ At the time of its establishment, Saudi’s King Fahad said: “The aim of the GCC is to achieve practical cooperation among GCC members. At present it is premature for the GCC to become a political union or federation, and talk about this matter is also premature.”²¹⁰ The recent Saudi proposal, the Riyadh Declaration, made at the GCC summit in December 2011, declared that it was time to transition the GCC from its cooperation phase to a union phase “as envisioned at its founding”.²¹¹ In order to justify the legitimacy and significance of the Riyadh Declaration, the Saudi King referred to the GCC Charter by citing its ambiguous wording as grounds for his proposal. This is telling – the Charter’s main objectives were written with equivocation, the ambiguous terminology enabling the GCC states to refer to their organisation’s charter to accommodate future endeavours, whatever they might be.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 102.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 101.

²¹⁰ Barnett and Gause (1998), 166.

²¹¹ Al-Saadi (2011).

Regardless of the GCC Charter's silence on defence and security cooperation among the six members, on January 25, 1982 the defence ministers of the six GCC states held a meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and laid the foundation of GCC defence cooperation. The GCC Secretary-General, Abdulla Bishara, announced that the meeting had "forged the tool for the edifice that will safeguard the security and stability of the Gulf with its own forces and without help from anyone".²¹² It was agreed to establish a joint command structure, and three main sets of actions in pursuit of common military goals were listed: a coordinated arms procurement policy, the development of a GCC military industry, and an improved, autonomous capacity for military training. The most important outcome of this meeting was the 'institutionalisation' of the GCC, where a broad guideline of defence cooperation was formulated by the defence ministers and, in turn, a defence structure under the Military Committee at the GCC Secretariat was established.²¹³

It is important to note that the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war in 1980 had produced the conditions enabling the six GCC states to create a joint defence pact that excluded the two regional powers: Iran and Iraq. Since the 1970s, the Gulf's eight littoral states²¹⁴ had been expressing their intention of formulating a joint regional security pact; however, they could not agree on a common formula. "Such a pact ... would provide a joint defence network against external threats, help prevent disputes from flaring into hostilities, and possibly constitute an initial step toward turning the Gulf into a zone of

²¹² Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 61.

²¹³ Dietl (1991), 160.

²¹⁴ The six GCC states along with Iran and Iraq.

peace.”²¹⁵ The main obstacles to the regional pact were Iraq and Iran: Iraq inspired mistrust due to its pan-Arab socialist ideology, while Iran was treated with suspicion because it was non-Arab and because of its age-old perceived efforts at Persian hegemony in the Gulf. The six GCC states thus took the opportunity during the Iran–Iraq war to establish a defence agreement that would highlight their security concerns as one sub-regional bloc.

The milestone development towards GCC defence cooperation was the establishment of the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) in October 1983, which saw the first-ever military exercise among the six member states. The chief purpose of the PSF had seemingly been to deter and deal with possible threats to the external security of the member states.²¹⁶ Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE committed around 1,000 men; Bahrain and Qatar sent 300 men each, and Oman sent 350 men to the UAE where “the exercises consisted of armoured ground units with fighter aircraft and attack helicopter support with an attack on a simulated ‘enemy’ position under-taken by the combined forces.”²¹⁷ The exercises were meant to demonstrate the feasibility of developing the GCC’s own rapid deployment force (RDF). “Such exercises could bring army commanding officers together and create a GCC rapid deployment force which can repel any external attack against any member state of the council.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Sandwick, J. A. (1987). *The Gulf Cooperation Council: moderation and stability in an interdependent world*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 171.

²¹⁶ Tripp, C. (1992). The Gulf States and Iraq. *Survival*. Vol. 34. No. 3. Pp. 43-61. 43.

²¹⁷ Dietl (1991), 166.

²¹⁸ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 62.

The PSF headquarters is in a Saudi army base at Hafr al-Batin, northeastern Saudi Arabia, under the command of a Saudi general. The headquarters contain an additional infantry-strength brigade gathering approximately 5,000 soldiers from all across the GCC; the PSF is composed mainly of Saudi soldiers, with Kuwait being the second-largest contributor.

*While the PSF has a multinational Gulf character, the core of the fighting capability is likely the Saudi Army brigade that existed in the area prior to the PSF's establishment. The multimember GCC force is reputedly under capacity, and it is not yet apparent whether the units have unilateral authority to intervene during domestic emergencies of civil disturbances.*²¹⁹

Its mission had not been clearly defined; however, it was intended to deter and respond to any military aggression against all or any of its members. Specifics entailed the PSF being the first line of defence against any external aggressor and then being assimilated into the chain of command of follow-on host nation forces.

The second annual exercise of troops, Peninsula Shield II, was held in 1984 and involved 10,000 men from all six states; it “included parachute drops of men and equipment, air support and intercept missions, night-time offensives and antiaircraft demonstrations”.²²⁰ According to the GCC Secretary-General, Abdulla Bishara, “the importance of the Peninsula Shield II manoeuvres lay in displaying the unity of vision and the determination to confront any aggression.”²²¹ Although the joint forces of the

²¹⁹ Dargin (2011), 241.

²²⁰ Sandwick (1987), 196.

²²¹ Dietl (1991), 166.

GCC states would familiarise themselves with terrain and address other logistical matters in each other's country, the aim of the exercises was not to train them to fight together in a battlefield.²²² Rather, the exercises were intended to train commanders and staff in achieving coordination for various military operations. The annual exercises were thus meant to prepare the individual forces of the GCC states to participate in a collective GCC RDF once it actually came into existence. As the Brigadier commander of the Kuwaiti force describes it, the idea behind forming such a force was to create "a striking force to deter any designs to interfere in the GCC states' internal affairs."²²³

On June 5, 1984, Iranian fighter aircraft entered Saudi Arabian territory, flying over Gulf shipping lanes; Saudi fighter aircraft were forced to engage and ended up shooting down an Iranian F-4 plane. The incident prompted the GCC states to increase their efforts in defence cooperation; on June 23, the GCC Chiefs of Staff decided to focus on air coverage as the best means for protecting navigation in the northern part of the Gulf. They recommended that the GCC leaders grant Oman an estimated of \$2 billion to upgrade its defence system and to "increase the effectiveness of its nascent radar network in the Strait of Hormuz in order to monitor Iranian activities aimed at obstructing navigation in the Strait".²²⁴ They also established a blueprint for a joint GCC deterrence capacity under the command of a Saudi general. The GCC rapid deployment force would gradually be achieved through "the linking of air and maritime defences under a unified centralised command, equipment standardization, joint training programmes and

²²² Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 64.

²²³ Dietl (1991), 167.

²²⁴ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 63.

exercises, and enhanced cooperation between and integration of internal security forces and their procedures”.²²⁵ However, approval for the GCC force appeared to be for a limited time period; it was intended as a temporary force that would be drawn from units of all six states in an emergency and then disbanded at the end of the crisis.²²⁶ Thus, the RDF was largely symbolic, as it did not really exist.

Although the GCC framework facilitated cooperation in defence, there were certain constraints on creating a common defence system due to disagreements among GCC states on the main purpose and technicalities of the PSF. The six members were unable to reach a consensus on who the GCC force should guard against: Saudi Arabia proposed splitting the force into two nuclei, deploying it into the southwestern and northeastern borders.²²⁷ This was mainly rejected by Oman on the grounds that it would constitute a provocation vis-à-vis Iran. Furthermore, Kuwait, Oman and the UAE insisted on a provision that when the force entered a member’s territory, the command structure would revert from Saudi Arabia to that of the host country. “This insistence underlines the preoccupation of smaller member states with Saudi meddling in their internal affairs and underlines the symbolic nature of joint military enterprises.”²²⁸ The smaller GCC states were wary of the notion of Saudi Arabian hegemony within the fields of external and internal defence cooperation.

²²⁵ Peterson (1988), 203.

²²⁶ Sandwick (1987), 197.

²²⁷ Dietl (1991), 167.

²²⁸ Legrenzi (2011), 78.

Meanwhile, the Saudi leadership took the lead in attempting to institutionalise internal security cooperation by pushing for a multilateral agreement among the six GCC states.²²⁹ In 1982, Saudi Arabia signed bilateral security agreements with Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar and Oman.²³⁰ Kuwait was the only GCC member that refused to sign a bilateral agreement with Saudi Arabia, nor did it sign a multilateral internal security agreement that was proposed at the fourth GCC summit in November 1983. The bilateral and multilateral agreements provided an extradition clause that allowed the right of hot pursuit by other member states into a member's territory,²³¹ which contradicted the Kuwaiti constitution (more on this issue in the case study chapter). Overall, even though defence plans were not taken further in practice, and although a multilateral security agreement was yet to be signed, the GCC states managed to protect their sovereignty during the Iran–Iraq war and create a significant institutional base for a united military defence strategy.

III. The GCC Monarchies in the Post-Cold War Middle East

The post-Cold War period brought about the 'new world order' presented by US President George Bush after the fall of the Soviet Union in early 1990. The foundation of the new world order was to be the notion of a post-Cold War international society in which justice and fair play and protection of the weak against the strong would drive the international community. "The will of that international society would be exercised

²²⁹ Nakhleh (1986), 46.

²³⁰ Sandwick (1987), 80.

²³¹ Legrenzi (2011), 80.

through consensus and implemented through an energised UN system free of the shackles put on it by the Cold War.”²³² Its main element was that a regional conflict would not serve as a proxy for superpower confrontation, but rather, nations from around the world would join together against an aggressor under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council. President Bush further defined the notion in the first of a series of post-Cold War speeches:

*The New World Order does not mean surrendering our national sovereignty or forfeiting our interests. It really describes a responsibility imposed by our successes. It refers to new ways of working with other nations to deter aggression and to achieve stability, to achieve prosperity and, above all, to achieve peace.*²³³

The Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait in August 1990 presented the world with its first post-Cold War crisis: “the global impact of the crisis ... provided the first test of cooperation across the old East-West divide and for the international community’s ability to reverse Iraq’s aggression.”²³⁴ The ensuing Gulf War in 1991 dramatically changed the Gulf region’s emerging balance of relationships, and more importantly, inserted a permanent American military infrastructure in the region. A key aspect of the post-Cold War notion of the new world order was its impact on US ambitions in the Gulf region: after US and coalitional military forces successfully pushed Iraq out of Kuwait, the US did not go further and invade Iraq. Instead, the US adopted the policy of “dual

²³² Ehteshami (2013), 33.

²³³ Freedman, L. (1991). *The Gulf war and the new world order*. *Survival*, 33(3), 195–209. 195.

²³⁴ Ehteshami (2013), 33.

containment”, cutting off diplomatic relations with two of the most important regional capitals: Baghdad and Tehran.²³⁵ Thus, US ambitions in the Gulf region during this period were modest, where the main goal was “to sustain the regional territorial and political status quo”.²³⁶ The Gulf strategic picture further changed after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The second Bush administration adopted a new policy under its “war on terror”, and changed its policy towards Iraq from containment to regime change.²³⁷

This chapter aims to present the GCC responses to all these events and the impact of the changing US policies in the region on their defence cooperation. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 created a heightened sense of insecurity which united the GCC states in terms of solidarity, but also highlighted the military weaknesses of these states, and thus, led to bilateral security agreements with the US. Due to their foreign dependence in security matters, this research argues that the GCC states experienced a stagnated period of collaborative defence cooperation. The following sections will thus present the GCC response to each event in terms of security and political integration efforts.

a. The Gulf War and the GCC response (1991)

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s decision to invade was justified on the basis of Iraqi claims to Kuwaiti territory; his suspicion that his regime was threatened by regional and international forces; and the economic and

²³⁵ More details later in the chapter.

²³⁶ Gause (2010), 88.

²³⁷ Katzman, K. (2003). The Persian Gulf States: Post-War Issues for U.S. Policy, 2003. *CRS Report for Congress*.

political repercussions of the eight-year long war with Iran. Iraq accumulated a debt of around \$70 billion due to the war, and despite government attempts to promote the private sector and domestic agriculture, Iraq remained in a weak economic position even after the end of the war in 1988. Saddam had demanded that its debt to Kuwait incurred during the war with Iran be cancelled. He further demanded that Kuwait pay compensation for Iraq's defence of Arab interests in the war. Saddam had accused Kuwait and the UAE of depriving Iraq of oil revenues by producing above their OPEC quota and so pushing down the price of oil. He also accused Kuwait of unfairly taking oil from the Rumaila field, which straddles the two states' border. "The seizure of Kuwait offered a solution at several levels – a distraction from domestic resentment at economic mismanagement, the possibility of acquiring Kuwaiti assets and investments, and the seizure of the oil wells themselves."²³⁸

As the end of the Cold war had brought down communist regimes in Eastern Europe, a widespread debate emerged in the Arab world about possible future democratisation in Iraq and elsewhere.²³⁹ Europe and the United States were calling attention to Iraq's efforts to obtain nuclear weapons and to Saddam's human rights abuses. Saddam thus began to suspect that domestic, regional and international forces were working against him, to the extent that his regime's survival was at stake. He adopted a more hostile attitude to the United States in particular, and began to openly criticise Washington. He called for an

²³⁸ Halliday, F. (1991). The Gulf War and Its Aftermath: First Reflections. *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 67(2), 223-234. 226.

²³⁹ Ibid.

Arab financial boycott of the US and returned to anti-Israeli rhetoric to mobilise support.²⁴⁰

*Such rhetoric was designed for consumption in the Arab world, as such tactics sought to rally Arab opinion, particularly in states that were supporting a growing coalition based in Saudi Arabia that had the potential to not only fight for Kuwait, but to undermine Saddam Hussein's regime by invading Iraq.*²⁴¹

Saudi Arabia had posed a potent threat to Iraq as it served as a base for the American coalition forces after its invasion of Kuwait. In the wake of the crisis, the GCC monarchies lined up behind their GCC partner, Kuwait; their unity was important to the US because it provided US military forces access to ports and bases in all six of the GCC states.²⁴²

The GCC states faced their most serious test of cooperation with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Given their military weakness during the previous Iran–Iraq war, “the speed and unanimity with which the Gulf states came together to support Kuwait and accept American and other international forces that would expel Iraq from Kuwait were remarkable.”²⁴³ All five of the GCC states stood behind Kuwait, even those whose security was not immediately threatened by the Iraqi occupation (Qatar, the UAE, and Oman), which demonstrates their belief that they saw their security as interdependent. The regional organisation's solidarity was symbolically expressed by the role of their

²⁴⁰ Gause (2010), 90.

²⁴¹ Legrenzi (2011), 124.

²⁴² Gause (2010), 107.

²⁴³ Barnett and Gause (1998), 180.

joint military force, the PSF, in the war. The PSF cooperated under a single command, yet maintained its individual national organisation and officers. General Khalid bin Sultan (the Saudi commander during the crisis), however, mixed units from different GCC states in various task forces, where he assigned the battalions of Omani, Emirati, Qatari and Bahraini brigades to the Kuwaiti border and to accompany Saudi forces in the original defence plans. The Peninsula Shield did not manage major achievements, nor was it a unitary GCC force; however, “it did express tangibly the unified sense of threat the Gulf regimes perceived from Iraq.”²⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the US had several reasons to oppose Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. For decades, US policy had indicated that the oil resources of the Persian Gulf were a vital American interest; Saddam’s annexation of Kuwait had given him control of 25% of the world’s oil reserves.²⁴⁵ With Saddam’s military on the Saudi border, Iraq was also threatening the United States’ closest Gulf ally, Saudi Arabia. The United Nations had also condemned the invasion, and issued numerous resolutions calling upon Iraq to withdraw.²⁴⁶ On November 29, 1990, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 678, authorising the use of force against Iraq if it did not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15, 1991. Iraq did not comply, and on January 17, US forces along with British, Kuwaiti, and Saudi air forces, began air attacks on Iraqi targets, dubbed “Operation Desert

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Gause (2010), 103.

²⁴⁶ *UNSC Resolution 660, UNSC Resolution 661, UNSC Resolution 662, UNSC Resolution 665, and UNSC Resolution 678*; In Freedman, L. & Karsh, E., (1991). *How Kuwait Was Won: Strategy in the Gulf War*. *International Security*, 16(2), 5.

Storm”.²⁴⁷ The ground war began on February 24 and ended 100 hours after it began. Kuwait was liberated.²⁴⁸

Before the Gulf War in 1991, the GCC states had sought security assistance from outside sources (mainly the US), whilst publicly asserting the principle of self-reliance.²⁴⁹ They valued highly the prospect of US military assistance but only as a very last resort. “They preferred to deal with threats by diplomatic means, inter-Arab coalitions, and pay-offs to potential aggressors.”²⁵⁰ Hence, none of the GCC states had entered into an official defence agreement with the United States. The GCC states had also been limited in binding themselves by a formal collective security arrangement. Abdulla Bishara, the GCC Secretary-General, outlined the two prime concerns on collective security amongst the rulers of the six states: first, any cooperation must be founded on trust and depend on the extent to which interests will be sufficiently similar as to make cooperation meaningful, useful and non-threatening. Second, “there exists the not unreasonable conviction that the resources of the governments of the six states are theirs alone to dispose as they see fit. No one should have any prior claim on those resources or decide how they should be exploited.”²⁵¹ The unwillingness of the GCC states to commit themselves to arrangements that might limit or control their own resources is a key characteristic of their security policies. These concerns, in fact, characterised the

²⁴⁷ Gause (2010), 111.

²⁴⁸ Freedman and Karsh. (1991), 5.

²⁴⁹ Tripp (1992), 43.

²⁵⁰ Kostiner, J. (1998). The United States and the Gulf States: Alliance in Need. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 4. 55.

²⁵¹ Tripp (1992), 43.

formation of the GCC and represented the relatively loose arrangements surrounding their cooperation efforts. In the ten years since its establishment:

*[E]lements within that culture have made it extraordinarily difficult for the rulers to bind themselves to any collective institutional arrangement, whether in the field of security or economic affairs. Instead, the GCC provides a forum for periodic consultation and for declarations of solidarity, as well as a framework for bilateral internal security cooperation agreements.*²⁵²

The GCC defence and security policies after the Gulf War remained a mixture of existing concerns, efforts to deal with the immediate impact of the war itself and attempts to make the necessary adjustments to ensure that members did not have to face the same situation again. Bilateral agreements and individually contractual arrangements have been the favoured ways of proceeding in any area in which the vital interests of the state have been concerned. The Gulf crisis did nothing to change that; indeed, it served only to highlight this approach to collective security, witness the individual signing of defence pacts with the US.²⁵³

There wasn't a broadly based strategic defence concept shared by the US and the GCC states. Rather, the US dealt with each state separately. On September 18, 1991, Kuwait signed an official defence agreement with the US and followed it up by pacts with Britain and France. Around a month later, Bahrain signed a defence pact with the US and further agreed to house the regional headquarters of the US Central Command. These agreements were based on an understanding that the US would defend its allies and sell

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

them arms.²⁵⁴ The GCC defence scheme after the Gulf crisis thus relied on agreements with major powers and the advancement of their own military technology.²⁵⁵ US officials described the GCC defence scheme after the Gulf War in a 2000 Congressional Report:

*Each GCC member has preferred to assure its primary defense against external aggression through unilateral measures: strengthening its own armed forces to the degree possible, and accepting defense cooperation agreements with outside powers. The United States...has signed defense cooperation agreements with all the members, except Saudi Arabia, and is seen by the GCC states as the primary guarantor of their external security.*²⁵⁶

However, certain disadvantages gradually emerged from the Gulf states' absolute reliance on US and Western forces against external military threats.²⁵⁷ After signing defence agreements with the US, the Gulf monarchies faced internal security threats from radical Islamic groups that were against a US military presence in the region.²⁵⁸ The US had stationed troops in various locations in the Gulf which had become the target of attacks by these radical Islamic movements.²⁵⁹ Tensions were heightened when two US army bases in Saudi Arabia were attacked by radical Islamic militants in June 1995 and

²⁵⁴ Kostiner (1998), 56.

²⁵⁵ Tripp (1992), 43.

²⁵⁶ Katzman, K. & Brown, G. (2000). Gulf Cooperation Council Defense Agreement. *CRS Report For Congress*.

²⁵⁷ Kostiner, J. (2010). The GCC States and the Security Challenges of the Twenty-First Century. *The Begin-Sadat Center For Strategic Studies*. Mideast Security and Policy Studies. No. 86. Israel. 2.

²⁵⁸ Kostiner (1998), 57.

²⁵⁹ Kostiner (2010), 2.

in November 1996.²⁶⁰ The Saudi leadership had experienced religious criticism and “fundamentalist-initiated riots”²⁶¹ against the government during the Gulf War in 1990–1991, and so had avoided signing an official security agreement with the US as other Gulf states had. For the same reason it had tried to deflect media attention as much as possible from the US military presence on Saudi soil. Hence, while the US remained the GCC’s supreme defence guarantor, the GCC states tried to limit their reliance on the US military, “since its presence and security policies were counterproductive to other Gulf security concerns”.²⁶²

To cope with these other threats, the GCC relied on other means of defence, including diplomatic cooperation with Syria and Egypt. In a somewhat symbolic step towards collective defence, the six GCC states had signed the Damascus Declaration in 1991, an initiative by Egypt and Syria to “entrust GCC land defences to Syrian and Egyptian infantry and armoured forces”.²⁶³ However, the GCC did not implement the accord because they did not trust Egypt and Syria, politically or in terms of their military capabilities. Understandably, from the Kuwaiti government’s perspective its immediate environment was perceived as uncertain and dangerous. The Kuwaiti minister of defence at the time stressed that “Kuwait is in a world in which the principle of Arab solidarity and respect for each other’s sovereignty had been torn apart by Iraq.”²⁶⁴ Hence, military

²⁶⁰ Kempster, N. (1996). Truck Bomb Kills 19 Americans at an Air Base in Saudi Arabia. *Los Angeles Times*.

²⁶¹ Kostiner (2010), 2.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Kostiner (1998), 55.

²⁶⁴ Tripp (1992), 43.

assistance from friendly Arab states, whether in the GCC or beyond, could only have symbolic value.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the Damascus Declaration provided a framework for military and economic cooperation,²⁶⁶ and fulfilled certain political purposes, mainly reaffirming the principles of the Arab League, which encouraged “a natural degree of bilateral consultation and limited cooperation that might take place among any group of friendly Arab states”.²⁶⁷

The GCC states also attempted to increase military cooperation among themselves. The military technology purchased from the US and Europe could potentially have given them superiority in equipment over Iran if they combined their operations in response to a threat. However, the Peninsula Shield had suffered difficulties in coordination and command since its formation in 1981. As noted above, the small (approximately 10,000 personnel) Saudi-based multilateral force did not react militarily to the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which exposed its deficiencies and weakness.²⁶⁸ Also, internal disputes among the GCC states complicated cooperation efforts, leading to the development of divergent threat perceptions. The disputes mainly surrounded their relations with Iran and Iraq. Saudi Arabia and the UAE had a dispute over Saudi’s progressive rapprochement with Iran; the Iranian takeover of Abu Musa (an island claimed by the UAE) had not yet been resolved; and Qatar and the UAE were making diplomatic overtures towards Iraq, which upset Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.²⁶⁹ Nevertheless,

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Katzman & Brown (2000).

²⁶⁷ Tripp (1992), 43.

²⁶⁸ Katzman, K. (2006). The Persian Gulf States: Issues for U.S. Policy, 2006. *CSR Report for Congress*.

²⁶⁹ Katzman & Brown (2000).

the GCC leaders continued to hold bilateral meetings and collective forums that served as a “declaratory process to legitimize, debate, or reject new security initiatives”.²⁷⁰

Overall, “the practice of achieving security in the Gulf combined a mix of imperfect strategies. While each strategy could prove to be advantageous in one area, it could strike at other shortcomings in Gulf security.”²⁷¹ For example, the GCC states’ reliance on US military power was essential; however, leaders had to compensate for liabilities such as terrorist attacks directed at US military stations and media criticism of their overreliance on the “imperialist” power. The GCC states sought to combat this criticism by building legitimacy through political and economic cooperation with Egypt and Syria, and by doing so, avoided developing military reliance on these states. Furthermore, the 1990s marked a decade free from serious security threats and conflicts in the Gulf region – the prospect of an Iraqi attack on the GCC states was substantially reduced after the Gulf War. Most of Iraq’s army had been destroyed in the war and its ability to harm the GCC states was effectively checked by UN Security resolutions, followed by occasional air and missile raids launched by the US and British forces against Iraqi targets. Meanwhile, Iran did not constitute an imminent threat, although it had demonstrated an appetite for territorial dominance in its occupation of the Abu Musa island. “Moreover, weapons of mass destruction with both unconventional and ballistic capabilities were presumably still held by Iraq despite constant UN inspections and also developed by Iran during the period in question.”²⁷² However, since the Iran–Iraq war, Iran had shown no interest in a

²⁷⁰ Kostiner (2010), 2.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

new war; rather, it preferred to establish good relations with the GCC in order to isolate its regional rival, Iraq. Hence, for the first time since the establishment of their regional alliance, the GCC states did not find themselves realistically threatened by either Iraq or Iran. The absence of immediate external threats to their sovereignties during the 1990s thus led to a period of stagnation in GCC cooperation efforts.

In September 2000, the GCC states agreed to increase the size of the PSF to 22,000 personnel; however, no timetable was set for the actual implementation of the plan. In the GCC summit in December 2000, the six GCC leaders signed a “defence plan” that would presumably commit them to defend each other in case of an external attack.²⁷³ More incremental progress was achieved in early 2001, when the GCC inaugurated its “Belt of Cooperation” network for joint tracking of aircraft and coordination of air defence systems. This system was expected to eventually include a link to US systems. The project is part of the US Cooperative Defence Initiative to integrate the GCC defence systems with each other and with the US. Another part of the initiative is US–GCC joint training to defend against a chemical or biological attack, as well as more general joint military training and exercises.²⁷⁴ However, as the GCC states did not enter into a collective GCC-centred security pact, their reliance on the West has allowed them to “grow lax in their regional security and diplomatic coordination.”²⁷⁵

²⁷³ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. (2011). Peninsula Shield Force: Ensuring the Gulf’s security.

²⁷⁴ Katzman (2003).

²⁷⁵ Kostiner (2010), 2.

b. The 9/11 Attacks and the GCC Response (2001)

The September 11, 2001, (“9/11”) attacks on the United States introduced new frictions in US relations with the Gulf states. The 9/11 attacks were claimed by a militant Islamist organisation Al Qaeda, where fifteen of the nineteen individuals involved were from Saudi Arabia. Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, was a Saudi national, greatly opposed to American policy in the Gulf region. Thus, “Saudi Arabia was the source not only of the personnel who carried out the attacks, but also of much of the ideological fervour and many of the logistical networks that underlay the growth of the *salafi* jihadist movement in the 1980s and 1990s.”²⁷⁶ The Salafi movement in Saudi Arabia originated during two successful Saudi–American cooperation efforts: the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s and the Gulf War in 1990–91. Since then, the Saudi–American relationship had been conducted far from the public gaze; however, after 9/11, the American public “wanted to know how a country that had been so close to the United States, which American forces had gone to defend just a decade earlier, had produced both the mastermind of the attacks and most of the perpetrators.”²⁷⁷

The immediate response to the 9/11 attacks by the Saudi authorities was to deny any Saudi involvement, noting that bin Laden had been stripped of his citizenship and was no longer a Saudi national. However, the American media continued to focus on the role of Saudi Arabia in the attacks, and the Saudi leadership took a defensive position. The remarkable aspect of the incident was that “elites on both sides worked to tone down the

²⁷⁶ Gause (2010), 136.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 144.

heated public rhetoric and maintain the relationship against its critics.”²⁷⁸ Indeed, the Saudi–American relationship remained strong, which is testament to how central it is to the security strategies of each country. In response to the media’s criticism of Saudi Arabia, the Bush administration stressed that all the GCC states had strongly condemned the 9/11 attacks, and that they had responded, to varying degrees, to US requests that they shut down financial networks used by Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups.²⁷⁹ The GCC states cooperated with the United States in the fields of intelligence, law enforcement and financial regulations.²⁸⁰ “Virtually all the Gulf states have instituted mechanisms to identify bank accounts of known or suspected terrorists or Islamic charities allegedly funding terrorist organisations, although they have been hesitant to freeze such accounts.”²⁸¹ Moreover, several of the Gulf states have indulged in active cooperation by arresting, facilitating the arrest of, or combating members of alleged terrorist cells on their territories. “In particular, the UAE has provided information that led to a few major arrests of Al Qaeda operatives, according to several press reports. Saudi Arabia announced in November 2002 that it had incarcerated more than 100 Saudi nationals suspected of having ties to Al Qaeda.”²⁸²

The 9/11 attacks in the United States added a new dimension to US relations with the Gulf states, beyond the need to contain longstanding threats from Iran or Iraq. After the attacks, the United States began pressing the Gulf states for their cooperation against Al

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Katzman (2003).

²⁸⁰ Mattair, T.R., (2007). Mutual Threat Perceptions in the Arab/Persian Gulf: GCC Perceptions. *Middle East Policy*, 14(2), 133–140.

²⁸¹ Katzman (2003).

²⁸² Ibid.

Qaeda activists and financial channels located in the Gulf states. The need for the United States to deal with all the security threats emanating from the Gulf gives the US a stake in the political stability of the Gulf regimes. However, tensions between the US and the GCC states, particularly Saudi Arabia, heightened over allegations that Gulf charities had “unknowingly” been contributing to or tolerating groups and institutions linked to Al Qaeda. “Many experts believe the Gulf states were tolerant of the presence of militants in order to avoid a backlash among citizens that agree with the militant’s anti-US, anti-Western stances.”²⁸³ For example, the September 11 Commission report had stated that the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 plot, Khaled Shaykh Mohammed,²⁸⁴ was warned by Qatari officials in 1996 of a US indictment, and fled. Qatar also hosts an outspoken Islamic cleric, Shaykh Yusuf Al-Qardawi, who has openly stated that it is a religious duty for Muslims to fight US forces in the region (after the US invasion of Iraq). Despite his anti-US rhetoric, the Qatari authorities tolerate his presence in their country and further allow him to appear at panel discussions with senior Qatari officials. Several Saudi Arabian clerics, and even some Saudi government officials, have made similar statements that appear to blame the United States and its policy for Islamic terrorism against the US.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the GCC states continued to work with the US against Al Qaeda and its affiliate movements in the region which posed a threat to their domestic stability. In May 2003, a Western house complex in Riyadh was attacked by Islamic militants, killing 23 people including nine Americans. More attacks occurred in the Kingdom, and

²⁸³ Katzman (2006).

²⁸⁴ He lived in Qatar during 1992-1996 at the invitation of the Interior Minister and former Minister of Islamic Affairs.

²⁸⁵ Katzman (2006).

sporadic attacks also occurred in Kuwait; however, the GCC states were able to capture and eliminate the Islamist militias.²⁸⁶

c. The US Invasion of Iraq and the GCC Response (2003)

The US invasion of Iraq in April 2003 generated a new set of threats and challenges for the GCC states.²⁸⁷ In May 1993, the Clinton administration had declared a policy of “dual containment” of Iraq and Iran, where the policy was explained as an effort “to keep both Iran and Iraq strategically weak simultaneously, in contrast to past policies that sought to support either Iran or Iraq as a counterweight to the other.”²⁸⁸ The US pursued this policy in cooperation with the GCC states – the threats had made it highly dependent on a significant military presence in the Gulf. Meanwhile, Iraq’s failure to fully comply with UN Security Council resolutions²⁸⁹ preventing the rebuilding of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities and prohibiting Iraq from importing any conventional weaponry since its invasion of Kuwait in 1991, sustained the strained relations it had with the US. In November 1998, the Clinton administration “publicly added a dimension to US policy that went beyond containment – promoting the change of the Iraqi regime – although the Clinton administration ruled out major US military action to achieve that goal”.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ CNN. (2003). Saudi official blames Riyadh attacks on al Qaeda.

²⁸⁷ Kostiner (2010), 2.

²⁸⁸ Katzman (2003).

²⁸⁹ These resolutions include U.N. Security Council Resolution 687 (April 3, 1991) and U.N. Security Council resolution 661 (August 6, 1990).

²⁹⁰ Katzman (2003).

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration changed US policy toward Iraq from containment to regime change, as part of the overall “war on terrorism.”²⁹¹ On January 29, 2002, President Bush addressed the American nation in a State of the Union speech, where he called Iraq part of an “axis of evil”, along with North Korea and Iran.²⁹² He identified the key threat as Iraq’s potential to deliver WMD against the United States and its friends and allies, or to transfer WMD technology to terrorist groups.²⁹³ For the most part, the GCC states publicly indicated that they would only support a US attack on Iraq if such an action were authorised by the UN and had broad international support. After gathering a small contingent of international supporters, the US and allied forces launched Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 19, 2003; subsequently, on April 9, the Saddam regime was ousted.²⁹⁴ “Two of the Gulf states, Kuwait and Qatar, were more openly supportive of the US position, and both hosted substantial buildups of US forces and equipment that were used in the offensive against Iraq.”²⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia was the most vocally opposed to a US offensive against Iraq, even though the prospect of the overthrow of Saddam held out the possibility that the 6,000 US personnel that were based in the Kingdom, in anti-Iraq containment operations, would be able to depart. That redeployment happened after Saddam’s fall.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² *Washington Post*. (2002). Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address.

²⁹³ Katzman (2003).

²⁹⁴ *History*. (n.d.). Bush announces the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

²⁹⁵ Katzman (2006).

The ousting of Saddam generated a sense of relief among the Gulf states, but also apprehension for as long as a stable, moderate government is not in place in Iraq and attacks on US-led forces continue. In the final statement of the 26th GCC summit in Abu Dhabi in December 2005, the Gulf leaders expressed their concerns that the spillover from the Iraq war could be worse than they had anticipated. Since the GCC states' support to the US and allied forces in the invasion of Iraq, several Sunni Islamist insurgents have committed acts of retribution against the GCC governments, and attempted to attack US military stations in the Gulf states.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, some Gulf states were concerned that the strategic weakness of post-war Iraq would embolden Iran to take a more active role in Gulf security and to seek to enlist the Gulf states in an Iran-led Gulf security structure.²⁹⁷ American policy in Iraq had strengthened Iran's regional role and placed Iranian allies in control of Iraqi politics. The GCC states thus worried about Tehran's efforts to spread its influence throughout the Arab world and Washington's unwitting assistance to Iranian ambitions.²⁹⁸

Meanwhile, GCC-US relations continued to be strengthened and GCC states' facilities were made available for the US to operate militarily in Iraq; they have even facilitated operations in Afghanistan. In terms of GCC defence cooperation, after the Iraq war, in 2006, the GCC PSF witnessed a significant operational change following a proposal by the Saudi monarchy. It proposed that the PSF should be transformed into a rapid deployment force (RDF), with troops based in their home countries but under a joint command. The idea was that the RDF would be able to immediately respond to any crisis

²⁹⁶ Katzman (2006).

²⁹⁷ Katzman (2003).

²⁹⁸ Gause (2010), 144.

in the GCC member states following a request by the GCC member in question.²⁹⁹ This crucial alteration in the format of the GCC's joint military force led to the unprecedented interference of the PSF in Bahrain in March 2011.

IV. The GCC Monarchies and the Arab Spring (2011–2012)

The Arab Spring demonstrations in the GCC states were perceived as extreme internal threats to the Gulf monarchies, mainly due to their consequences in terms of regime change in neighbouring Arab countries during 2011 and 2012. Of the six GCC states, the four most affected by the Arab Spring were Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait, demonstrations involved approximately 1% of the total citizen population; meanwhile, in Bahrain, the figure was around 40%.³⁰⁰ These numbers are relatively low in comparison to other demonstrations that occurred in the Arab region during the Arab Spring; however, this research asserts that the impact of these demonstrations speaks volumes in terms of the public perceptions of the Gulf leaderships. Regardless of the low participation in demonstrations, the high level of media attention that these events attracted, domestically and internationally, was considered an extreme threat to the legitimacy of these regimes (particularly due to the fact that neighbouring Arab dictators fell as a direct result of street demonstrations).

The GCC leaderships' response to the Arab Spring demonstrations was unprecedented in terms of the intensity of violence and the strengthening of unity among member states. More importantly, the threat of the Arab Spring demonstrations prompted the Gulf

²⁹⁹ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. (2011). Peninsula Shield Force: Ensuring the Gulf's security.

³⁰⁰ Zunes (2011).

leaders to include the GCC within their domestic affairs by strengthening GCC unity and fostering collective mechanisms in the preservation of their regimes. Each Gulf monarchy faced demonstrations with varying demands, and each Gulf leadership responded differently due to its particular political structures and governance. This section thus presents the various political and economic challenges in each state, which ultimately culminated in the demonstrations of the Arab Spring. As this research selected Kuwait as its case study, the following section will describe the events of the Arab Spring in each of the other GCC countries by way of comparative analysis.

a. Bahrain

Under Al-Khalifa rule, Bahrain gained its independence from Britain in 1971; the leadership proclaimed Bahrain a constitutional democracy as a result of public demand.³⁰¹ Domestic movements demanding greater political representation may be traced back to 1938, when a group of activists from both the Shi'a and Sunni communities approached the Bahraini leadership and the British governor with a list of demands for wider political participation.³⁰² The Bahraini constitution was approved on June 3, 1973, comprising 109 Principles, and the Bahraini ruler ratified it in December of that year.³⁰³ It defines the country as an Arab Islamic State, governed by hereditary rulers, but also provides for the separation of powers between the Executive and the Legislature.³⁰⁴ Bahrain's first National Assembly was inaugurated in December of 1973; the council consisted of 30

³⁰¹ Alkim. (1994), 53.

³⁰² Bahrain gained its independence from Britain in 1971.

³⁰³ The Constitution of Bahrain.

³⁰⁴ Amin (1984), 201.

members elected and 30 members appointed. Among the elected members, the majority were Shi'a candidates and those in opposition to government. Due to the alarming (anti-government) results of the election, the parliament was dissolved in 1975. Bahrain has since witnessed secular, nationalist, and leftist movements inspired by the political, social, and economic conditions of each decade.

Like its neighbours, Bahrain's reform process has been driven by a combination of external and internal factors; external factors include the rulers' response to pressures for reform by Western leaders.³⁰⁵ After signing a defence pact with the US in 1991, Bahrain became a vital island in the stationing of the US navy; it is the headquarters of the fifteen vessels of the Fifth Fleet, entailing around 1,500 US personnel.³⁰⁶ The Bahraini Emir's relationship with the American government was thus strengthened, and substantially enhanced his domestic position. The alliance with the US provided the Emir with an added dimension of power, similar to how his predecessors had secured greater strength with every signed treaty or agreement with the British government. As a result, the gap between the Emir and the Bahraini people widened after 1991, leading to an increased level of violence and an intensifying of government repression.³⁰⁷ The mid-1990s witnessed a deprived economy and the political alienation of large parts of Bahrain's society, which ultimately led to a series of violent riots and an aggressive government

³⁰⁵ Quillian, N. (2008). Political Reform in Bahrain: The Turning Tide. In A. Ehteshami & S. Wright (Eds.), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*. Essay, Reading: Ithaca Press. 81.

³⁰⁶ Zahlan, R.S. (2002). *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*. London: Ithaca Press. 77.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

responses.³⁰⁸ The strong US presence, along with the growing political and economic problems in Bahrain, prompted 300 leading professionals to petition the Emir, appealing for the restoration of the National Assembly in Bahrain, dissolved since 1975. The Emir responded to the petition by establishing a Consultative Council in December 1992, comprised of thirty appointed men for a period of four years.³⁰⁹

Another petition was drawn up in early 1994 when the country's unemployment rates continued to soar, in particular in the Shi'a towns and villages where it reached an estimated 30% (whereas the national average was 15%).³¹⁰ The Shi'a community leaders led the movement and supported calls for political reform and the reinstatement of the 1973 Constitution and election of a new National Assembly. The Bahraini Shi'a have been marginalised from formal power structures and face institutional discrimination by the government. The government reacted harshly to their petition and arrested a young Shi'a cleric regarded as the leader of the movement. As crowds gathered in protest at the arrest, security police attacked the protestors with tear gas and rubber bullets, sparking a popular response throughout the country. By late 1994, several of the instigators of the movement had been either imprisoned or forced into exile, which led to further demonstrations demanding their release. This event prompted a long period of confrontation between Bahrain's security police and Bahraini protestors.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Wright, S. (2011). Generational change and elite-driven reforms in the kingdom of Bahrain. *Durham Middle East Papers*. Sir William Lace Publication Series. Paper No. 7.

³⁰⁹ Zahlan (2002), 77.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Bassiouni (2011).

Demonstrations continued calling for the reinstatement of the Constitution and the National Assembly, the improvement of economic conditions, and for the release of prisoners who had been held for many months without charge or access to lawyers. The government responded to these demands by inflicting further aggression on demonstrators; in April 1995, riot police stormed the University of Bahrain to disperse 200 students who had gathered to protest against the arrest, imprisonment, and enforced exile of many Bahrainis. By mid-1995, an understanding seemed to have been reached between the Shi'a community leaders and the government; however, it did not last long. The international community began to express their concerns about the events in Bahrain, in particular the massive arrests and absence of charges, the torture of detainees and capital punishment for political prisoners.³¹² In January 1996, Amnesty International urged the Bahraini government to release prisoners, to ensure that those charged had legal access, and to ban torture in prisons.³¹³

In 1999, the accession of the new Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Issa, led to a series of reform measures that had an immediate impact on the Bahraini political scene. He developed a dialogue with opposition leaders and made concessions that included the release of all political detainees, and he welcomed exiled Bahrainis back to their homeland. He further announced municipal council elections and pushed for the right of women to vote in them. His most significant step towards political reform was the appointment of a Supreme Committee to prepare a "National Action Charter" that would

³¹² Zahlan (2002), 77.

³¹³ *Amnesty International*. (1996). Bahrain: Amnesty International Appeals For Immediate Release Of Prisoners Of Conscience Following Mass Arrests.

amend the constitution and provide a general framework for constitutional, legislative, judicial, political, and economic reform, in November 2000.³¹⁴ Two years later, on February 14, 2002, Sheikh Hamad announced in a televised speech that the “amended constitution” had been enacted. In the same speech, the Emir declared Bahrain a Kingdom, and proclaimed himself King.³¹⁵ By this time, the enthusiasm for King Hamad that was apparent in his first two years of rule was beginning to diminish; furthermore, the amended constitution (or the “new constitution”) was presented to the people without any room for discussion or negotiation.

Bahrain’s government opposition renders a wide spectrum of groups; distinctions reflect the Sunni–Shi’a divide, as well as a division between Islamic and liberal ideologies, and differences in the assessment of King Hamad and his policies. Discussions and heated debate revolved around a long list of specific grievances, among the most important of which involved the following: the National Charter, the new parliament, the security services, corruption and the role of the ruling family, and continued discrimination against the Bahraini Shi’a. Opposition groups argue that the National Charter is an ambiguous document which the Bahraini people had no choice but to accept: “their choice boiled down to either remaining in a situation of oppression or trying their chances with a badly drafted document.”³¹⁶ They accused the government of handing the committee that was appointed to discuss and write the Charter an already

³¹⁴ Bassiouni (2011).

³¹⁵ Parolin, G. (2011). *Reweaving the Myth of Bahrain’s Parliamentary Experience*. In Tetreault, M. et al. *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition*. Lynne Reinner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado. 21.

³¹⁶ Peterson, J. E. (2009). *Bahrain: Reform-Promise and Reality*. In Teitelbaum, J. *Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf*. Columbia University Press, New York. 160.

completed Charter at their first meeting. The members of the committee were expected to review and approve it, regardless of provisions stating that the King and the Charter were to be empowered above the Constitution. This led to the resignation of five members of the committee. The opposition, therefore, charged that the King completely altered the 1973 Constitution without seeking the agreement or even the opinion of the people.

Objections to the National Charter included the way in which it was enacted in an unconstitutional way and the fact that it completely changed the Constitution contrary to the rights of the people. “The King has used the charter as a way around the constitution in order to propose very limited amendments to his new “amended constitution” as it is officially termed.”³¹⁷

The National Charter also restricted the role and powers of parliament in comparison with the previous powers of the National Assembly under the 1973 constitution. The National Assembly initially consisted of 30 elected members and a maximum of 14 government ministers; the number of elected members rose to 40 during its second legislative term. However, under the 2002 constitution, the new parliament consists of 40 elected members as well as 40 members appointed by the government (replacing the 14 government ministers). Thus, the number of elected and appointed members was made equal, with the President of the Consultative Council being given voting rights in case of a tie, providing a 51% majority for the appointed members. King Hamad had promised that the appointed Consultative Council would be purely consultative, while legislative functions would be reserved for the elected lower house. However, both bodies are

³¹⁷ Ibid.

considered to be the legislative body; and any changes or amendments to the constitution would require a two-thirds majority of the combined houses.³¹⁸

Another major grievance aired by the opposition was the unconstrained role of the Bahraini security forces. Allegations of abuses during demonstrations remained unresolved, where no action was taken against any security official who committed crimes of torture. On the contrary, senior officers of the security forces had been rewarded. Furthermore, the security forces are monopolised by the Al-Khalifa family and their Sunni allies, who acquire command positions, while a high proportion of the lower ranks consists of non-Bahrainis. Corruption, and the role of the Bahraini ruling family, also represented a serious grievance by the opposition: the family remains above the law and reaps unfair economic benefits from the system. “Tales abound of the top members of the family taking over nearby islands as their personal estates, owning hotels, shopping malls and office buildings.”³¹⁹ Furthermore, an increase in family members in government positions was noted in 2007, where 14 out of the 26 ministers were from the ruling family. Finally, continued discrimination against the Bahraini Shi’a by the royal family is a central opposition grievance. Many Shi’a have pointed out that there has not been much done to improve their inferior social and economic positions. Sitra, the third largest island in Bahrain, whose population is predominantly low-income Shi’a, had endured the most arrests during demonstrations. The Shi’a form between 60% and 70% of the total Bahraini population³²⁰, yet only 10% of the top government officials are Shi’a.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Matthiesen, T. (2013). *Sectarian gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn't*. California: Stanford University Press.

Furthermore, while many Bahraini Sunnis support the demands of the Shi'a, they are said to have been threatened by the regime to keep quiet in order to save their jobs or business prospects. "Indeed, it is held that the government actively encourages sectarian conflict for its own purposes by persuading Sunnis that the Shi'as threaten them and the system."³²¹

The Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, a prime Shi'a government opposition group, achieved a major victory in the first municipal election in 2002. In fact, "... it has in effect been the leading force in a cluster of opposition groups in the country and its actions have had a critical impact on the process of reforms in Bahrain."³²² As it won the majority of seats in the municipal elections, when it came to the more important 2002 parliamentary election, it chose to boycott due to the provisions in the new constitution that expanded the role of the appointed Shura Council. The elections were held in October 2002, when the absence of Al-Wefaq was accentuated by the increase in the number of seats taken by Sunni Islamic candidates. Sunni Islamists won 20 seats, the Shi'a independents won a total of 13, and the rest went to independent Sunni candidates. Nevertheless, the new parliament that was created in the wake of the 2002 constitutional amendments lacked many essential features of an autonomous institution. It was therefore a key setback in Bahrain's political reform process, and prompted relations to further deteriorate between the government and the opposition.³²³

³²¹ Peterson, J. E. (2009). 160.

³²² Ehteshami (2013), 145.

³²³ Ibid.

In March 2004, four of Bahrain's opposition groups (Al-Wefaq Society, the National Democratic Action Society, the Nationalist Assembly, and the Islamic Action Society) sought to collect signatures to urge the King to annul the 2002 constitutional amendments. The amendments had awarded the appointed Shura Council the same legislative powers as the elected Council of Representatives, resulting in claims of a weak parliament. The Bahraini Royal Court advised against organising the petition; however, the opposition groups went ahead and started to collect signatures. This led to the arrest of 19 opposition figures on the charge of "advocating changes to Bahrain's political system by illegal means, encouraging hatred of the state and distributing false news and rumours".³²⁴ This action marked the first political arrests made during King Hamad's reign.

In September 2004, the Bahraini government arrested Abd al-Hadi al-Khawaja, the former executive director of the banned Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, and disbanded the organisation after al-Khawaja publicly blamed the Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa Al-Khalifa, for the country's economic problems and human rights abuses. The arrest prompted further demonstrations that exerted pressure on the regime to release al-Khawaja following a royal pardon in November 2004. However, demonstrations continued in March 2005, where around 80,000 demonstrators marched on the streets of Sitra. The demonstration was in response to Al-Wefaq's call urging constitutional reforms in defiance of a government ban on demonstrations.³²⁵ Four years after boycotting the new general elections, the opposition decided to change its strategy and try

³²⁴ Quillian (2008), 81.

³²⁵ Ibid.

to work within the system. In the November 2006 parliamentary election, Al-Wefaq gained most of the seats it contested, giving them 17 seats. The King appointed the new upper house, selecting mostly liberals to offset the victory of religious conservatives in the lower house. A new government was formed in December 2006, with Sheikh Khalifah bin Salman Al-Khalifa reappointed as Prime Minister; and for the first time in Bahrain's history, one of his three deputy Prime Ministers was a Shi'a, and another Shi'a was named Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.³²⁶ Despite the continuing political crisis, where the government failed to address the core issues of representation and allocation of power in the new constitutional monarchy, the government managed to hold its third parliamentary election, in October 2010. However, the 2010 parliament faced further disruptions; demonstrations broke out before the first session, leading to police brutality and mass arrests. Any sort of political dialogue has been discredited due to the government's brutality against the opposition. "The government's efforts to launch a national dialogue over the summer of 2011 with the opposition stalled in the aftermath of state brutality against Shi'a neighbourhoods and wholesale arrests of members of the opposition."³²⁷

Overall, the promise of political, economic, and social reform at the turn of the century had been delayed as the Bahraini government failed to address its citizens' grievances.³²⁸ By the mid-2000s, it was clear that the future of political and economic reform depended as much on the support the ruler received from the conservative forces within the regime,

³²⁶ Parolin (2011), 21.

³²⁷ Ehteshami (2013), 145.

³²⁸ Bassiouni (2011).

as from the demands being made by the opposition. Sectarian tensions were apparent while the government's unwillingness to relinquish parliamentary power to the majority curtailed the prospect of reform. By the time of the Arab Spring demonstrations, it was evident that there was no easy balance between the opposition and the regime in Bahrain.³²⁹

The roots of the Arab Spring in Bahrain can therefore be traced back to the accession of King Hamad Al-Khalifa in 1999. He had offered a programme of reforms in an attempt to move away from Bahrain's authoritarian tradition; however, the lack of implementation of many of the reforms had added to the growing dissent.³³⁰

Dissatisfaction with the pace of reforms carried over to the 2010 parliamentary elections, with calls by the opposition to boycott elections. Inspired by the events of the Arab Spring in the region, a Facebook page called "February 14th Revolution in Bahrain" was established and called for mass protests throughout Bahrain to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the National Action Charter. The page rapidly gained popularity with several thousands of people joining. Furthermore, a youth group emerged calling itself the "Youth of the February 14th Revolution" and issued a statement outlining their demands; they claimed to be unaffiliated with any political organisation or any religious, sectarian, or ideological base for their demands. They also underlined their intention to organise peaceful demonstrations. Political movements such as Haq, the Bahrain Islamic Freedom Movement, and Wa'ad began supporting the planned demonstrations.

³²⁹ Ehteshami (2013), 145.

³³⁰ Mabon, S. (2012). The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry. *Middle East Policy*, XIX(2).

On February 14th, 2011, (the ‘Day of Rage’) peaceful demonstrations erupted throughout Bahrain. Protests varied in size and political orientation; the number of people participating in the demonstrations was estimated to be over 6,000. Demand slogans varied, with some calling for political reform and others for socio-economic change. Political reforms focused on constitutional reform and the removal of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, who has held his position since 1971.³³¹

*The demands expressed during the earlier demonstrations related mainly to political and constitutional reform, which was to pave the way for greater popular participation in governance, equal access to socio-economic opportunities and development, action against corruption, and termination of the alleged practice of political naturalization. These demands were supported across the board, and did not reflect sectarian or ethnic characteristics.*³³²

The Bahraini government was aware of the planned demonstrations and began dispatching police patrol cars around the capital to attempt to disperse them. Clashes occurred between demonstrators and police that eventually led to the use of tear gas and rubber bullets, and the death of a couple of demonstrators due to police brutality led to larger crowds of mourners.

Over the next three weeks, more opposition groups, including the largest Shi’a opposition group, Al-Wefaq, joined the demonstrations. As the movement expanded, the demonstrators displayed sharp differences in their agendas; opposition groups Haq and al-Wafa were putting forward new sets of demands that called for the outright end of the

³³¹ Kinninmont (2012). Bahrain: Beyond the Impasse, 3.

³³² Bassiouni (2011).

Al-Khalifa monarchy and its replacement with a republican system.³³³ Meanwhile Al-Wefaq presented limited demands that mainly called for a real constitutional monarchy in which the Prime Minister would be chosen by the parliamentary majority.³³⁴ Clashes intensified when demonstrators began to march around the capital of Manama demanding the end of the Al-Khalifa monarchy. The government initially responded with force, opening fire on demonstrators and allowing “pro-regime thugs” to attack them.³³⁵ However, due to Western pressure, the Bahraini government allowed peaceful protests to continue. Behind-the-scenes discussions began to take place, where demonstrators continued their protest in a relatively peaceful atmosphere. However, the government and the opposition failed to yield in the sense of moving towards a meaningful course of action. According to a political analyst: “This apparent stalemate, coupled with increasingly provocative protestor tactics and Riyadh’s view that protecting the regime was a red line, likely triggered the intervention of Bahrain’s partners.”³³⁶

At the request of the Bahraini government, on March 14, 2011 the GCC Peninsula Shield Force entered Bahrain. The force consisted of an estimated 1,200 Saudi troops accompanied by an estimated 500 Emirati police, along with a few Qatari troops.³³⁷ While dozens of tanks and over a hundred army trucks entered Manama, King Hamad announced a three-month “state of national safety”, stipulating a partial curfew, a ban on

³³³ *Amnesty International*. (2011). Bahrain: A Human Rights Crisis. Briefing Paper, 2.

³³⁴ Louer, L. (2011). A Failed Uprising in Bahrain. *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 2.

³³⁵ *International Crisis Group*. (2011). Popular Protests in North Africa and The Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt. Middle East/North Africa Report, No. 105.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ *Arab Times*. (2012).

demonstrations and broad powers for the military.³³⁸ The “state of national safety” is in accordance with the Bahraini constitution, which seeks to cover all areas of Bahrain, mandating the Bahraini Defense Force (BDF), public security forces, National Guard and any other forces as necessary, measures and procedures to preserve the safety of the nation and its people.³³⁹ Regardless of the King’s decree, demonstrations continued in the following weeks, and the government began a definitive crackdown on demonstrators leading to a death toll of at least 45 individuals since February 2011, along with thousands of arrests.³⁴⁰ According to the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), at least five people were reported dead as a result of torture in the custody of the Bahraini government.³⁴¹

On March 16, 2011, security forces stormed the Pearl Roundabout, the centre point of the demonstrations, and forcibly evicted protestors. The government then began to launch “a clearly planned and orchestrated crackdown on the Shi’a political and community leaders and activists who had been prominent in leading the protests ...”³⁴² The Bahraini ruling elite targeted the Shi’a in order to stir up sectarian tensions within the country, and delegitimise the demonstrators’ calls for political reform. Although the majority of the protestors were Shi’a, the demonstrations did not initially have a sectarian agenda. Rather, they were driven by demands for political and democratic reform and calls to

³³⁸ *International Crisis Group*. (2011). Popular Protests in North Africa and The Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt.

³³⁹ *Global Security*. (n.d.). Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC].

³⁴⁰ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2011). Bahrain’s Uncertain Future. *Foreign Policy*.

³⁴¹ Bassiouni (2011), 163.

³⁴² *Amnesty International*. (2011). Bahrain: A Human Rights Crisis, 3.

solve the dispute over the place and powers of Bahrain's weak bicameral parliamentary system.³⁴³ However, by focusing on the Shi'a demonstrators, the government was creating a sectarian dichotomy and "playing a classic divide and rule card by hindering the emergence of a unifying cross-sectarian opposition group".³⁴⁴ With the support of the Saudi monarchy, the Bahraini leadership went further in accusing the Shi'a demonstrators of being Iranian "loyalists". By associating Iranian influence with the protestors' demands and intentions, the Bahraini government (in accordance with the Saudi leadership) enabled the Sunni Muslim regimes in the Gulf region to delegitimise demands for political reform by fusing the issues of Shi'a loyalties and Iranian influence onto "one amorphous threat".³⁴⁵ Police checkpoints were set up at the entry and exit point of Shi'a villages and towns, and hundreds of Shi'a were arrested. The government also began demolishing dozens of Shi'a mosques, deeming them illegal and claiming that they were used as staging points for attacks against police forces and for the manufacture and storage of weapons. In its attempts to associate pro-reform demonstrations with sectarian strife, any form of anti-government protests thus became labelled 'unpatriotic'.³⁴⁶

This research asserts that, as with Kuwait, the subject of the case study, the Bahraini Arab Spring came out of the country's existing political and economic atmosphere and

³⁴³ Wehrey (2013).

³⁴⁴ Kumetat, D. (2012). Genuine Reform or More of the Same? Revisiting the Arab Spring in the Gulf. In BRISMES Annual Conference 2012. *Revolution and Revolt: Understanding the Forms and Causes of Change*. 3.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Al-Khawaja, M. (2014). Crackdown: The Harsh Realities Of Nonviolent Protests In The Bahraini Civil Conflict. *Journal of International Affairs*, 68(1), 189-XII. 194.

the fragile position of the Al-Khalifa ruling family. It points to the struggle between the government and the opposition, and mostly the overwhelming disappointment over the King's failed promises of reform. The Bahraini experience corroborates this research's hypothesis in claiming that the Gulf leaders utilised the GCC as a vehicle for regime preservation, applying similar tactics to survive the Arab Spring. The Bahraini monarchy utilised all three tactics under the broad GCC strategy for regime preservation: *enhancing its legitimacy, heightening its internal security, and collaborating in a defence scheme*. During a GCC ministerial meeting held in Riyadh on March 10, 2011, the GCC alliance pledged USD 20 billion to both Bahrain and Oman. The financial plan was arranged to support the Bahraini and Omani populations by creating job opportunities for the unemployed and improving overall living conditions.³⁴⁷ By accepting the GCC's \$10 billion in financial assistance, the Bahraini monarchy attempted to enhance its legitimacy by providing its citizens with financial incentives to prevent further dissent. The Bahraini monarchy also heightened its internal security by utilising police violence on peaceful protestors. And finally, it collaborated in a defence scheme by requesting the PSF to enter its capital, Manama, in order to quell the demonstrations.

This research further argues that the Bahraini uprisings represent deeper grievances, mostly experienced by the Shi'a majority of the Bahraini population who had suffered repression and discrimination despite the promise of democratic reform by the Bahraini leadership ten years before. The sectarian divide within the Bahraini population was a key tool that was utilised by the Bahraini and Saudi leaderships; in aggravating sectarian tensions, the aim was to deflect demands for political reform and discredit the opposition.

³⁴⁷ Kholaif (2011). GCC "Marshall Plan" to Aid Bahrain and Oman, Al-Qabas Reports.

The intensity of the Bahraini demonstrations during the Arab Spring had prompted the Saudi Arabian monarchy to propose the Riyadh Declaration in December 2011, where it suggested a closer GCC union as an attempt to secure the GCC regimes. Overall, the deployment of the Saudi-led GCC force into Bahrain speaks volumes on regime perseverance in the Gulf region, where the combination of financial compensation, repressive forces and regional alliances represent the main tactics utilised by the Gulf monarchies in sustaining their autocratic rule over their respective populations.

b. Oman

Sultan Qabus Al Bu Sa'id rules Oman as an absolute monarch. With the support of the British in 1970, he had orchestrated a coup d'état, overthrowing his father, the reigning Sultan, Sai'd ibn Taymur.³⁴⁸ Although oil exports began in 1964, Sultan Sa'id had refused to change his conservative policies. The country seriously lacked social and economic development; towards the end of his reign, there were only three schools in the country and a few miles of paved roads.³⁴⁹ Due to the Sultan's strict isolationism, the British supported a coup d'état by his son, Qabus, in 1970. The first pressing issue that faced the new Sultan was the expanding rebellion in the province of Dhofar. The rebellion had begun in 1964 as a popular protest against Sultan Sa'id and his autocratic and neglectful rule; however, at the end of the 1960s, Marxist groups overtook the leadership of the protest and expanded the scope of the movement to include anti-

³⁴⁸ Valeri, M. (2006). Liberalization from Above: Political Reforms and Sultanism in Oman. In Khalaf, A. & Luciani, G. *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*. Dubai: Gulf Research Center.

³⁴⁹ Cleveland, W. L. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 394.

monarchical and anti-imperial goals. The Dhofar rebellion became the home base for Marxist forces throughout the Gulf region; China and the Soviet Union provided assistance to the rebels, while South Yemen offered sanctuary to those who fled the Sultan's forces. Sultan Qabus received assistance from neighbouring monarchs, including the Shah of Iran and the King of Jordan, who both sent contingents of troops to help contain the spread of Marxism.³⁵⁰ In the midst of the rebellion, Sultan Qabus directed large sums of development funds to projects in the Dhofar province; his reconciliation policy succeeded in defusing the rebellion, and in 1976, a combined force of Iranian and Omani troops defeated the rebel forces and reestablished the Sultan's rule.

After disposing of the insurgency, the new Sultan was able to begin the transformation of his nation; he was faced with a country that was plagued by disease, illiteracy and poverty. He had also inherited an old and autocratic-patriarchal political system where the sultan holds all the power. The people would come directly to the sultan for advice, demands and requests. The existing structure of government was minimal and ill-equipped. The previous sultan's deliberate policy against formal education had prompted most of the educated Omanis to work outside the country. "The country lacked nearly all infrastructure, including a modern port, roads, schools, electricity outside the capital area, and even office space for the government."³⁵¹ One of the Sultan's first measures was to abolish the old political system and replace it with a modern government structure and

³⁵⁰ Cleveland (2004), 394.

³⁵¹ Peterson, J.E. (2004). Oman: three and a half decades of change and development. *Middle East Policy*. 126.

develop the country's resources.³⁵² He thus began the transformation of his nation with the launch of an extensive infrastructure development programme. "Schools and highways were quickly constructed, and the capital city, Muscat, underwent a rapid change in appearance."³⁵³ The development programme also aimed at upgrading health and educational facilities around the country. In his first speech to his nation in August 1970, the Sultan launched his vision for the country and emphasised the importance of his people's well-being. As part of his method of administering the country, the Sultan initiated an annual meet-the-people tour around the country, where he would visit every corner of the country and be accompanied by government ministers and advisors. The philosophy behind the tour was that the government should not be alienated from the ordinary citizen.³⁵⁴ Within a decade of assuming power, Qabus was able to raise the standard of living of his population and generated widespread support for his rule.

As Sultan Qabus maintained his rule as an absolute monarch, a political system slowly began to develop. Oman had neither a constitution nor a legislature; the Sultan himself served as the Prime Minister, while members of his family headed the ministries. It was not until 1981 that initial steps toward political participation were taken; Sultan Qabus issued a decree for the establishment of a Consultative Council, consisting of 45 members, including the 17 members of government. The Council was to convene four times a year, and its powers were limited to discussion of public policies and recommendations to the government. Ten years later, in November 1991, the Sultan

³⁵² Alhaj, A.J. (2000). The Political Elite and the Introduction of Political Participation in Oman. *Middle East Policy*, 7(3), 97–110. 98.

³⁵³ Cleveland (2004), 394.

³⁵⁴ Alhaj (2000), 99.

replaced the Council with a Consultative Assembly, Majlis al-Shura, as a way to broaden the process of public political participation in government. The Assembly consisted of 59 “elected” members (final selection is made by the Sultan) and has minimal legislative powers; it mainly serves as a channel of information between the people and the government ministries. It is permitted to provide recommendations on drafts of economic and social legislation prepared by the ministries; however, it does not have any authority in the areas of foreign affairs, defence, security, and finance.³⁵⁵ In 1994 , the Majlis expanded the number of its seats to 79 and in 1998, it was further expanded to 89 due to Oman’s population increase between the years 1994 and 1997.³⁵⁶

In November 1996, Sultan Qabus issued a royal decree setting out the Basic Law of the state. This was seen as the first written expression of constitutional law in the country’s history, providing the legal framework for the development and implementation of all legislation and government policy.³⁵⁷ It became the basis for all legal decisions in the country and the ultimate point of reference for judicial authority. The Basic Law guarantees various rights for citizens within the framework of Shari’a and customary law; it also provides rules for the royal succession. The Basic Law provides for a Council to be formed, called the Majlis Oman, which comprises members of the elected Consultative Assembly and the appointed Majlis al-Dowla, and an independent judiciary. The main purpose of this Majlis is to determine the basic structural organisation of the political administration in the country; it is not intended as a democratic institution that

³⁵⁵ Alkim (1994), 54.

³⁵⁶ Alhaj (2000), 106.

³⁵⁷ Peterson (2004), 134.

represents the will of the people. Instead, it provides a forum for the exchange of views and for mediation between government and people.³⁵⁸ Several amendments were made to Article 9 of the Law, where it states that the Council is to acquire some legislative powers in the social and economic fields, and the right to question members of the government. However, despite these significant amendments, Omani political participation has remained minimal.³⁵⁹

Sultan Qabus remains the prominent authoritative figure in all decisions concerning the country. Nevertheless, his efforts in developing and modernising the nation, in comparison to the isolationist views of his father, have greatly impacted his popularity among the population. History plays an important role in the preservation of a monarchy, and the promulgation of social and economic development has empowered the Sultan to perpetuate his rule of governance for the past four decades. However, as this research will soon discuss, the new era of the Arab Spring in 2011 has brought out an inclination in the Arab world towards meeting demands for public participation in governance, regardless of the popularity of a monarch.

Influenced by the Arab Spring in the region, Oman experienced a set of early demonstrations in the port city of Sohar, northwest of its capital, Muscat. Beginning with a small-scale demonstration on January 17, 2011, just days after the Tunisian President Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia, an estimated 200 Omanis protested against the rising price of basic goods, government corruption, and low wages. The protest was organised

³⁵⁸ Siegfried, N. (2000) Legislation And Legitimation In Oman: The Basic Law. *Islamic Law and Society*, 3(7), p. 359 – 397. 376.

³⁵⁹ Alhaj (2000), 107.

through social media, and included a protest by a number of teachers who staged a sit-in outside the Ministry of Education, demanding fair wages and a syndicate of teachers.³⁶⁰

Sporadic protests quickly spread across the country, leading to the first of a series of so-called Green Marches.³⁶¹ The first and second Green Marches were organised by Omani youth in Muscat, through the use of Facebook and other internet forums. The Omani activists were calling for social, economic and political reform; and were basically prompting the Sultan to restart a neglected political reform process. Demands included an elected Prime Minister and Parliament, the end of corruption, new cabinet ministers, and more economic opportunities for college graduates and the youth.³⁶²

In late February 2011, a sit-in was organised in the town of Sohar by young and unemployed people from neighbouring cities at the local branch of the Ministry of Manpower. Skirmishes with the Sohar police led to mass arrests and the death of one protestor.³⁶³ The news quickly spread across the country, and from then on Sohar's Globe Roundabout, renamed 'Reform Square', became a gathering place for protestors. Further demonstrations sprouted across the country, demanding more job opportunities and measures to curb rising prices and inequalities, along with an end to corruption, the promulgation of a constitution to replace the Basic Law, the guarantee of a separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, and above all, the appointment of a prime

³⁶⁰ *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law*. (2011). Constitutional Reform in Arab Countries: Oman. Heidelberg Impressum.

³⁶¹ Worrall (2011).

³⁶² Spinner (2011).

³⁶³ Valeri, M. (2015). *Simmering Unrest And Succession Challenges In Oman*. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Washington, D.C. 8.

minister. Meanwhile, accounts of harassment by security forces and violations of basic human rights were exposed on the Internet.³⁶⁴ On April 22, 2011, Oman faced its biggest pro-reform demonstrations, in the southern port city of Salalah.³⁶⁵ Around 1,000 protestors demanded political reform and regime accountability, referring to the corruption of former ministers within the government.³⁶⁶

The government's response to these protests was violent; police were sent in, leading to the death of at least two protestors.³⁶⁷ At the same time, Sultan Qabus conceded to a petition that was handed to him outlining the protestors' demands for civil and political rights and making calls against government corruption. The Sultan responded by firing several cabinet ministers who were accused of corruption, raising the minimum salary of Omani citizens by 25%, and promising the creation of some 90,000 jobs in the public sector. He also promised the acceleration of the process of 'Omanization', which aims to fill positions occupied by expatriates with Omani citizens.³⁶⁸

Overall, the protests appeared to be triggered by heightened economic and political expectations rather than a radical discontent with the regime. The demands revolved around additional reforms, such as higher salaries, by the Sultan rather than around revolutionary change.³⁶⁹ The demonstrations eventually subsided due to the gradual

³⁶⁴ Valeri (2015), 10.

³⁶⁵ *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law*. (2011). Constitutional Reform in Arab Countries: Oman.

³⁶⁶ *IBN Live*. (2011). Omanis protest in Salalah to demand reform.

³⁶⁷ Valeri (2011).

³⁶⁸ Arslanian, A. (2013) The Sultanate of Oman: Sons and Daughters. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 1(22), pgs. 8-12. 11.

³⁶⁹ Arslanian (2013), 11.

political and economic reform efforts put in train by the Sultan, the positive image he holds among Omanis and the moderate use of repression by the police force. According to news sources, Sultan Qabus made a decision to pardon 234 protestors detained over the course of the Omani demonstrations.³⁷⁰ On October 15, 2011, the government held scheduled elections for the lower house of the country's legislative body, generating a high turnout by the Omani population.³⁷¹ With more positive changes, the Sultan further assured the Omani people freedom of speech and formally asked the government to fight corruption with the full force of the law.³⁷²

The demonstrations in Oman certainly raised concerns among the members of the GCC. Unlike to the Bahraini monarchy, the Sultan of Oman was able to handle the country's unrest without calling for the assistance of the GCC Peninsula Force to quell the protests. However, the Sultan did accept the USD 10 billion financial package offered by the GCC to Oman as an opportunity to create employment and improve the overall living conditions of the Omani population.³⁷³ To further ensure a GCC role in any future protest that would take place in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia advanced a plan for political unity among the Gulf States in the Riyadh Declaration. However, the plan to move the GCC 'from a phase of cooperation to a phase of union within a single entity' was not fully

³⁷⁰ *Carnegie Middle East Center*. (2011). News from Oman.

³⁷¹ Katzman, K. (2013). Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy. *Congressional Research Service*, (7-5700), 30.

³⁷² *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law*. (2011). Constitutional Reform in Arab Countries: Oman.

³⁷³ Kholaif (2011). GCC "Marshall Plan" to Aid Bahrain and Oman, Al-Qabas Reports.

supported by other GCC leaders, as they were wary of surrendering their sovereignty.

Oman was perhaps the most vocal in opposing this Saudi plan.³⁷⁴

The Omani experience in the Arab Spring in 2011 has its similarities and differences with other GCC states, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. First, as the main purpose of the Omani demonstrations was to protest against economic and political conditions, the people were not demanding complete regime change. After ousting his father in 1970, the Sultan had brought remarkable prosperity and modernised the country's infrastructure. In fact, according to a 2010 United Nations Development Programme report that examined the overall progress made in 135 countries over the past 40 years, Oman ranks first in health, education, and income.³⁷⁵ Nevertheless, since 2009, young Omanis have begun to push for more political change, the rule of law, freedom of speech and new institutions.³⁷⁶ Second, there was a mix of violence and concessions in response to the Arab Spring demonstrations. Violence did occur, with a death toll of two protestors and more than a hundred individuals arrested.³⁷⁷ However, several peaceful demonstrations took place in Oman, a marked distinction from how the Bahrain ruling elite was violently reacting to its demonstrators at the time.³⁷⁸ Moreover, Sultan Qabus quickly recognised that the promise of reform was a better and more pragmatic solution.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ Katzman (2013). Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy. 16.

³⁷⁵ Neubauer, S. (2011). How the Arab Spring Skirted Oman. *Huffington Post*.

³⁷⁶ *The New York Times*. (2011). Oman.

³⁷⁷ Valeri (2011).

³⁷⁸ Spinner (2011).

³⁷⁹ After Tunisia.

On October 15, 2011, seven months after Omanis took to the streets to demonstrate for reform, Oman held scheduled elections for the Majlis al-Shura, the consultative council.³⁸⁰ Voter turnout was 77%,³⁸¹ and a record of 1,113 candidates ran for the 84 seats at the council.³⁸² The Sultan had promised to expand the powers of the Majlis, evolving it into a proper legislature. However, many Omanis did not perceive the elections “as a vehicle to bring the change they were seeking, either because of distrust of the candidates or scepticism about the assembly’s ability to wield influence in a system dominated by Sultan Qabus”.³⁸³ Referring to the election, a businessman in Muscat stated: “I think it has a fifty percent chance to bring change. There is hope. But most [economic and political] development comes from the government and His Majesty. He has more knowledge.”³⁸⁴ Even though the Sultan took steps towards reform by creating jobs and firing corrupt ministers, Omanis were sceptical as to the implementation of further political reforms. According a social policy specialist at Oman’s Sultan Qabus University: “These moves were aimed at calming the situation. They wanted to prevent bigger protests [from developing].”³⁸⁵

A final feature of the Arab Spring in Oman relates to its special relationship with Iran. Sultan Qabus is the only Gulf leader, in fact, who has a strong relationship with Iran; “since assuming power, the Sultan has played a delicate balancing game between his

³⁸⁰ Al-Hashmi, F. (2011). Oman's elections bring hopes, doubts of institutional change. *The Christian Science Monitor*.

³⁸¹ *Election Guide*. (2016). Sultanate of Oman.

³⁸² Neubauer (2011).

³⁸³ Al-Hashmi (2011).

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Al-Hashmi (2011).

strategic alliance with Iran while aligning himself with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).”³⁸⁶ Unlike its neighbours, Oman is not wary of an Iranian threat; according to some political analysts, its Shi’a community is not susceptible to Iranian influence.³⁸⁷ Although this research does not adhere to the theory that Iran has instigated any of the demonstrations in the Gulf states during the Arab Spring, it does assert a degree of Iranian influence on the Bahraini demonstrations through Iranian media outlets. Oman, on the other hand, has the advantage of there being no threat of Iranian influence on its population.

Overall, the Omani leadership did use similar tactics too other GCC states in suppressing street demonstrations during the Arab Spring. This research highlights its utilisation of three tactics under the GCC strategy for regime preservation: first, the Omani leadership attempted to enhance its legitimacy through the distribution of financial incentives. The private sector minimum wage for citizens was increased by 43% in mid-February 2011.³⁸⁸ The Omani government further introduced a monthly allowance of about \$390 for job seekers, created new jobs for citizens in the public sector, doubled the monthly social security allowance for eligible families in need and increased student allowances. The Omani government also utilised the tactic of heightening its internal security in its deployment of police to suppress peaceful demonstrations, leading to at least three deaths of protestors. It attempted to discredit its opposition, where “the repeated labelling of the protesters as scum and vandals by senior official and national

³⁸⁶ Neubauer (2011).

³⁸⁷ Katzman (2013). Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy. 14.

³⁸⁸ Valeri (2011).

media showed the regime's inability to accept the legitimacy of those who were expressing alternative opinions without accusing them of breaching the public order.”³⁸⁹ Lastly, the Omani government collaborated in a defence scheme when it signed and ratified the GCC Internal Security Agreement in November 2012. Although Oman rejected Saudi Arabia's plan to upgrade the GCC into a union of the six states,³⁹⁰ it did not refrain from ratifying the GCC internal security pact aimed at strengthening mutual cooperation in security matters.

Furthermore, Oman registered a 51% increase in defence spending in 2012, where its defence and national security forces absorbed 36.5% of the state's expenditure in 2012.³⁹¹ Hence, although the Omani government did not apply extreme measures like the Bahraini regime, it did take a harsh approach in Sohar, where this research asserts that the death of the three protestors should not be taken lightly. Further strengthening its defence and security on an individual and collective GCC level implies that the Sultanate will go further down the extreme line in preserving its regime. Like its fellow GCC neighbour, Kuwait, Oman has had a history of ensuring an individual approach (with no GCC interference) when it comes to its domestic policies. However, just like in Kuwait, the Arab Spring has brought the threat of regime change and led the Omani leadership to preserve its regime in both an independent and a collective GCC capacity.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Omani Foreign Minister, Yusef bin Alawi, stated that Oman “would not be a part of” the GCC union if it happened.

³⁹¹ Valeri (2011).

c. Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Arabian political system is based on a fusion of tribal and state institutions.³⁹² Under Al-Saud family rule, the political system has changed remarkably little since 1902, where Ibn Saud and his successor sons have established a traditional autocracy. In 1954, the Saudi Kingdom established a Council of Ministers that is presided over by the King; the King and the Council of Ministers were to be the ultimate source of legislative, executive and judicial power in Saudi Arabia. In 1958, regulations were made to consolidate the authority of the Council of Ministers. However, it was not until March 1980 that a Constitutional Committee was entrusted to draft a formal constitution.³⁹³ The sons of Ibn Saud continue to rule the Kingdom; each son brought certain reforms during their leaderships in the context of different circumstances pertaining in the Kingdom. In 1962, King Faisal introduced his Ten-Point Program aimed at demonstrating his commitment to political reform. Its pledges included freedom of speech within the framework of the Islamic faith and general law and order; improved healthcare, education and social services; economic reform; and the complete abolition of slavery.³⁹⁴ One of the most important elements of his planned reforms was the creation of a 'Basic Law' or constitution and the creation of a Consultative Assembly, an independent judiciary. However, Faisal's proposal did not pass into law and gradually disappeared from public awareness.

³⁹² Wilson, P. W., & Graham, D. (1994). *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. 35.

³⁹³ Amin (1984), 196.

³⁹⁴ Graham and Wilson (1994), 52.

Nevertheless, during his reign, King Faisal engaged in an aggressive state-building programme, instituting an expansive welfare system that guaranteed free health insurance and education for all Saudi citizens. He also instigated massive national projects aimed at building the nation's infrastructure: airports, roads, power stations and communication networks. Despite the modernisation efforts, the status of women was still bound by tribal laws. King Faisal's path towards reform and modernisation, like many Saudi kings after him, came up against the conservative *ulema*, or Islamic clerics. During his reign, he established the Ministry of Justice, where the *ulema* were appointed to the ministry and became state officials; this gave Faisal the power to hire and dismiss the religious authorities whose permission was required for his reforms. He ultimately hired the most liberal and removed those most resistant to change.³⁹⁵ Further political reforms were attempted under the reign of his brother, King Fahad, in 1982; however, hopes for reform were crushed, as the early 1980s brought the ascension of the religiously strict Mujahedeen and the downward movement of the Saudi economy.³⁹⁶ It was not until the 1990s, after the Gulf War, that minimal reforms were introduced.

Saudi Arabia experienced its first Arab Spring demonstrations in late January 2011, influenced by the uprising in Tunis and triggered by a devastating flood in its second largest city, Jeddah. Demonstrators in Jeddah staged a rally protesting against the city's poor infrastructure; after dozens were arrested, the Saudi government vowed to improve things.³⁹⁷ In February and early March 2011, the protests spread to cities across the

³⁹⁵ Wynbrandt. (2010), 117.

³⁹⁶ Graham and Wilson (1994), 60.

³⁹⁷ Alsharif. (2011).

Kingdom, including its capital, Riyadh and its Eastern Province. The demonstrators were making various demands that included the release of political prisoners, labour rights and women's suffrage. According to Human Rights Watch, Saudi police arrested more than 160 protestors; one particular Saudi citizen, Khaled al-Johani, was arrested for allegedly calling for freedoms and democracy in Saudi Arabia during a protest in Jeddah.³⁹⁸ Local non-profit organisations, such as the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association and the Saudi Human Rights First Society, also took part in the protests. Saudi women organised a suffrage campaign called "Baladi" through the social network, Facebook, pointing out that Saudi law stipulates women's electoral rights, yet, the government bans their participation.³⁹⁹ Also included was a women's right to drive campaign, where a Saudi woman, Manal al-Sharif, posted a 'YouTube' video of herself driving that led to her detainment by the Kingdom's religious police.⁴⁰⁰

The highest number of casualties due to police force, however, occurred in the Shi'a-dominated Eastern Province. Viewed by the government as the most controversial, the Shi'a protestors called for the release of all political prisoners, freedom of expression and assembly and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the Eastern region.⁴⁰¹ Demonstrators' chants also included calling for the downfall of the Al-Saud monarchy.⁴⁰² As the organisers of the demonstrations insisted on the use of non-violent

³⁹⁸ Buchanan, M. (2011). Saudi Arabia: Calls for political reform muted. *BBC News*.

³⁹⁹ Shaheen, A. (2011). Saudi women defy ban to register for polls. *Gulf News*.

⁴⁰⁰ Al-Shihri, A. (2011). Manal al-Sherif, Saudi Woman, Detained For Defying Driving Ban. *The Huffington Post*.

⁴⁰¹ *IRIB World Service*. (2012). Saudi protesters demand cleric release.

⁴⁰² *Al-Jazeera*. (2012). Saudi Shia protesters mourned by 'thousands'.

resistance against police force, many demonstrators were shot dead or arrested, and numerous accounts of police brutality and torture were reported.⁴⁰³ A cycle thus began, where funerals of dead protestors led to more protests, and protests led to more arrests and police violence.

As a tactic in regime preservation, the Saudi King announced a plan to distribute a financial package to all citizens on February 23, 2011. King Abdulla declared funding to offset high inflation, granting salaries for the young unemployed, higher wages for students studying abroad, as well as cancelling some citizen loans. Moreover, Saudi employees received a 15% increase in their wages, and additional cash for housing loans. The overall Saudi welfare package introduced by the King is worth \$10.7 billion;⁴⁰⁴ exceeding the cost of every national budget prior to 2007.⁴⁰⁵ This research identifies the Saudi government's financial package as the most conspicuous of its answers for restraining Saudi citizens from demanding reforms. The government's commitment to its citizens has been deemed unsustainable in terms of future funding; allowing such a drain highlights the drastic measures that the Saudi leadership is willing to adopt in order to preserve its regime. The drawback to this welfare package lies in the uncertainty that the good economic environment of the past years will continue; the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecast Saudi's GDP growth to decrease by almost half from 2011 to 2012. Furthermore, the collective GCC financial assistance pledge to Bahrain and Oman will add to the future budgetary burden of the Kingdom. Therefore, maintaining an

⁴⁰³ Reuters. (2012).

⁴⁰⁴ Al-Jazeera. (2011). Saudi king announces new benefits.

⁴⁰⁵ Colombo, S. (2012). The GCC in the Mediterranean In the Light of the Arab Spring. *Mediterranean Paper Series*. The German Marshall Funds of the United States.

upward curve on the government's commitments to its citizens is a key challenge for the Saudi leadership in the long run.⁴⁰⁶

The Saudi government's attempts to placate its population by financial incentives did not appear to be enough to ensure loyalty to the King. Alongside such generous benefits lay a form of conditional demands: in March of that year, the Grand Mufti, head of the Saudi Arabian Council of Senior Scholars, issued an anti-protest fatwa. The fatwa warned citizens against internal dissent, and declared that reform measures will be dictated by the royal and clerical powers, and not by the people.⁴⁰⁷ The fatwa came along conveniently after the King announced the benefit plans – a clear manoeuvre to obstruct rather than delay any form of political and social demands by its citizens. With the announcement of the financial packages and, thereafter, the fatwa, certain tensions were alleviated. However, demonstrations throughout the Kingdom continued to manifest, indicating the difficulty in financially appeasing a country consisting of 16 million nationals afflicted by a lack of political, social, and economic, and human rights.

In further attempts to prevent street demonstrations, the Saudi authorities began the process of creating a new anti-terror law which, according to Amnesty International, “threatens to exacerbate an already dire situation for freedom of expression, in which any real or perceived dissent is almost instantly suppressed”.⁴⁰⁸ The law would legalise a number of abusive practices, including arbitrary detention. Several human rights groups described the draft anti-terror law as setting out to “strangle peaceful dissent” and detain

⁴⁰⁶ Shehadeh, N. (2011). Economic Costs, the Arab Spring and the GCC. *Gulf Research Center*.

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Alawi, I. (2011). Saudi Arabia's anti-protest fatwa is transparent. *The Guardian*.

⁴⁰⁸ *Amnesty International*. (2011). Saudi Arabia: Repression in the Name of Security.

people “potentially indefinitely” without charge or a trial.⁴⁰⁹ Activists say thousands of people are being held in Saudi prisons without charge or access to lawyers, despite a law that limits detention without trial to six months. The draft law would largely formalise such practices.⁴¹⁰ Consequently, Saudi authorities have announced their revision of the law, making it less severe.⁴¹¹

Nevertheless, the Saudi monarchy’s repressive reaction towards demonstrations during the Arab Spring indicates that the monarch will not tolerate internal dissent, and will do everything in his power to keep control of citizens. The Al-Saud monarchy has historically allied itself with the Wahhabi religious group, allowing them to control the religious and social elements of the country. Some Saudi citizens believed in King Abdulla’s willingness for reform, and criticised the Saudi Wahhabi authorities for preventing such reforms to happen. Moreover, as the King warned against national disunity, the actions of the police and the deaths of many protestors have spurred sectarian tensions. The Saudi Shi’a have long felt discriminated against by the monarchy; the Saudi authorities responded harshly to their demonstrations in the Eastern Province, and further began accusing them of being Iranian loyalists. However, demands for political reform have been echoing throughout the Kingdom, rising above the Shi’a/Sunni dichotomy, and many political analysts have predicted that, eventually, the situation will worsen if the Saudi leadership does not yield to gradual reform.

⁴⁰⁹ *Al-Jazeera*. (2011). Rights group criticises Saudi anti-terror law.

⁴¹⁰ *Refworld*. (2011). Response to Saudi Arabia over draft anti-terrorism law.

⁴¹¹ *The National*. (2011). Saudi anti-terrorism law is being revised, official says.

Overall, the Saudi monarchy proved that it would go to extremes in order to preserve its regime during the Arab Spring. It utilised its position in the GCC to take military action against political dissent, and encouraged a strengthened union among GCC leaderships as a key strategy for regime preservation. The Saudi leadership enlisted its fellow GCC members to follow a strategy for regime preservation in the Riyadh Declaration in December 2011, where the Saudi monarch mentioned the particular tactics of financial incentives and a collaborative defence scheme to suppress internal dissent. Saudi Arabia's goal of creating a "greater GCC" and transforming it into a union does not seem far off given the reality on the ground: the six member states of the GCC are dependent on each other, and it is acknowledged by all leaderships that if one regime falls, others will follow. All six members are facing internal challenges where their citizens are demanding more political participation; and all six governments have utilised tactics in delaying such demands. Hence, the future of the GCC regimes are interlinked, and the governments' response to the Arab Spring demonstrations have certainly portrayed their keenness to preserve their regimes within a united GCC.

V. Conclusion

This chapter presented a brief overview of the Gulf regional framework, and cooperation among the six GCC states. It began with a brief overview of the main goals and objectives of the GCC organisation and its economic, political and defence cooperation during the Iran–Iraq war (1981–1989). It then presented the external challenges these states faced during the post-Cold War period, starting with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Reliance on the US and Western forces to liberate Kuwait became a crucial

driver in terms of transformation of the GCC states' defence arrangements. Before the Gulf War, the GCC states had stressed the importance of self-reliance within their security realms – even though they were purchasing large amounts of arms from the US. However, after Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the GCC states' security became heavily dependent on foreign assistance, and most of the GCC monarchies signed bilateral defence pacts with the US. Furthermore, the consequences of US policy in the region after the 9/11 attacks on the US and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq in 2003 prompted Islamist militias to threaten the internal security of the GCC states. Yet, the GCC states continued to strengthen their relationship with the US. Finally, this chapter presented the events of the Arab Spring in Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia, and thus provided a comparative analysis to the Kuwaiti case study (see chapter four). It confirms this research's hypothesis by demonstrating that all three of the mentioned Gulf leaderships utilised the GCC as a vehicle in preserving their regimes: throughout their individual Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011–2012, they attempted to enhance their legitimacy, heighten their internal security and collaborate in a defence scheme. The next chapters will thus focus on Kuwait, its political history, and its experience during the Arab Spring.

Overall, this chapter provided a key understanding of the expected behaviour of the GCC countries to internal and external threats. The analysis of the GCC reaction to past experiences has shed light on the expected behaviour of the GCC countries to the Arab Spring. In facing threats in the past, the GCC countries made attempts at strengthening their cooperation within the GCC; however, they mainly depended on outside forces, focusing on their independent foreign and domestic policies. The expected behaviour is thus characterised by two main reactions: first, presenting a pseudo-united front, where

GCC members announce their strengthened unity without a clear roadmap to how they will do so; and second, maintaining their individualistic policies in foreign and domestic issues. When the Arab Spring demonstrations in the region began to pose a threat to the Gulf monarchies, the GCC members reacted in the expected manner. However, an interesting turning point occurred when GCC members began to allow the threat of the Arab Spring to override their individualistic domestic policies. An unprecedented degree of unity among the GCC monarchies during the Arab Spring is accounted for by the implementation of common tactics under a broad GCC strategy of regime preservation. This chapter has indicated the pretence of a GCC united front in the face of previous challenges, and in upcoming chapters, this research will build a case that indicates a deeper GCC unity that was generated by the fear of regime change in the Middle East region during the Arab Spring.

Chapter 2

The Kuwaiti Political System

I. Introduction

This chapter provides the political background of Kuwait in order to better understand this research's case study on how the Kuwaiti leadership was able to overcome the political turbulence generated by the Arab Spring. The hypothesis of this research is that the Gulf leaderships utilised their regional organisation, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as a vehicle in preserving their regimes during the Arab Spring. It demonstrates that the Gulf leaderships depend, to some extent, on each other for survival, and have employed shared tactics in order to preserve their regimes. The case study examines the Kuwaiti Arab Spring between early 2011 and late 2012; a timeline chosen on the basis that it marks the beginning and end of street demonstrations and government responses thereto. The last set of demonstrations took place towards the end of 2012; it was followed by a period of stability and, according to this research, marks the end of the Arab Spring in Kuwait.

This chapter provides a brief background on Kuwait's political history and the origins of its political system, unique within the Gulf region inasmuch as the constitution offers the right to political participation and freedom of speech.⁴¹² The chapter outlines the

⁴¹² The Constitution of the State of Kuwait.

structure of the political system from its inception during the late eighteenth century and further explores historical relations between the Al-Sabah rulers and Kuwaiti society during the pre-oil era. It briefly examines key historical transformations such as the British–Kuwaiti colonial relationship and the advent of the oil industry. The discovery of oil in 1938 and the distribution of its revenues during the 1950s generated an interesting shift in Kuwait’s political development, especially in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The makeup of its population demographic after the rise of the oil industry also represents an interesting aspect which showcases the Kuwaiti leadership’s capacity to manipulate groups within the population in order to maintain its rule. Finally, this chapter presents an analysis of the Kuwaiti Constitution and its electoral system.

II. The Origins of the Kuwaiti Political System

Kuwait is the most politically liberal of the six GCC member states, with an independent domestic policy that respects the freedom of its citizens.⁴¹³ It has a political structure that may be traced back to the eighteenth century, and whose main ingredient is the practice of consensus and consultation. The establishment of the Kuwaiti Constitution in 1962 further engraved this notion on the political consciousness of the country, where parliamentary politics developed and a partially elected parliament became the main source of legislative power. Kuwait was founded in the early eighteenth century by clans of the Anaiza, a tribe from Najd (a region in central Saudi Arabia).⁴¹⁴ A group of different

⁴¹³ Unlike the GCC monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and the UAE, whose constitutions do not assert the rights of citizens.

⁴¹⁴ Crystal (1990), 18.

tribes migrated from Najd to the Gulf coast to escape drought and famine, and within these migrations, a new tribe was formed with the name of 'Bani Utub'. As the Bani Utub tribe migrated south of the Gulf coast in search of water, they finally settled in the area of *kut*, or Kuwait, where they found a small settlement already established by the Bani Khalid tribe.⁴¹⁵ The Bani Khalid tribe was welcoming and peaceful, allowing the Bani Utub to flourish, making use of in the skills of boatbuilding sailing from their maritime heritage. Although the Bani Khalid controlled the harbours, the tribe kept to the desert, and the Bani Utub began a bountiful maritime trade that transformed the settlement into one of the busiest harbours in the Gulf. "Bani Khaled support (to the Bani Utub tribe) contributed to Kuwait's rapid rise as a trading town."⁴¹⁶ Testimonies and letters were written by several European travellers and British political residents from as early as the 1800s that testify to Kuwait's prosperous trading and the busy harbour.⁴¹⁷ One such traveller described Kuwait as:

Chiefly inhabited by mercantile and trading people, who engage in all branches of commerce carried on throughout the Gulf. The port sends out, at least, a hundred sail of vessels, large and small; and the people who navigate them...have the highest character for probity, skill, firmness, and courage.
(Buckingham, 1891: 463).⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ The Bani Khalid tribe had built a fortress (*kut*) from which the name Kuwait is derived. In Crystal (1990), 18.

⁴¹⁶ Crystal (1990), 18.

⁴¹⁷ Abu-Hakima, A. (1982). *The Modern History of Kuwait: 1750–1965*. Montreal: McGill Univ. 123.

⁴¹⁸ Crystal (1990), 19.

The peacefulness of the Bani Khalid tribe is not the only reason for the success of the port; its prime location enabled it to profit from the caravan trade to Aleppo and Baghdad, and also from the trade of the neighbouring Shatt al-Arab port. Due to the equity of its rule and the freedom of its trade, the Kuwaiti settlement flourished, becoming a prosperous trading and maritime town that regularly attracted immigrant groups from surrounding areas (Najd, southern Iraq, Iran, Baluchistan, Yemen, Oman and the southern Arab coast).⁴¹⁹ In 1863, a British political resident estimated Kuwait's population at 20,000 inhabitants.⁴²⁰

To adapt to life in a settled economy, the Bani Utub tribe developed new political, economic and social structures. "Tribal traditions were retained, but they were now placed within a more complex occupational and social stratification."⁴²¹ A division of labour appeared, where pearl divers were distinguished from rope pullers, captains, or merchants. The proceeds from pearling and trade were thus divided on the basis of occupation; at the top was the merchant class, who soon became an elite. With the aim of establishing a political arrangement within the tribe, the merchant elite families held a council meeting and chose a respected member of the community, a man named Sabah, to become their leader, *subject to consultation*.⁴²² The Al-Sabah family had arrived from Najd during the seventeenth century. The appointment was based on the practice of tribal consensus and consultation, where a practical division of tasks between governance and

⁴¹⁹ Al-Nakib, F. (2014). Revisiting Ḥaḍar And Badū In Kuwait: Citizenship, Housing and the Construction of a Dichotomy. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 46(01), 5–30.

⁴²⁰ Crystal (1990), 19.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

commerce was preferred over the ascension of one family to a position of dominance over the rest.⁴²³ Sabah was thus elected as a representative of the settlement and ruled until his death in 1762.

The basis of Al-Sabah power was political. The Al-Sabah rulers were not the most pious or learned; they were not skilful sailors or warriors; nor were they the wealthiest family. “Their currency was diplomatic and negotiating skills.”⁴²⁴ Their role was mediating relations between clans and maintaining peaceful relations with neighbouring tribes and the Ottomans. Kuwait was considered as “an Ottoman dependency, linked administratively and economically through Basra”.⁴²⁵ The Al-Sabah family also became the tax collectors of the settlement – taxation was a significant source of revenue in this period – making them not only the diplomatic face of Kuwait to neighbouring settlements but also the overseers of local administrative affairs. By the late eighteenth century, a political hierarchy was well established, “the merchants deferring to direct orders from the Sheikh”. By the nineteenth century, the ruling Al-Sabah was able to name his son as successor, thus transferring the family’s role “from leader to ruler”.⁴²⁶ Nevertheless, the merchant families were at the height of an economic hierarchy where the town’s public treasury was mostly derived from revenues from their import duties and boat taxes. The Al-Sabah family depended on these revenues in order to protect land trade caravans and fend off incursions from Arabian raiders. Thus, the relationship between the merchant

⁴²³ Salem, P. (2007). Kuwait: politics in a participatory emirate. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

⁴²⁴ Crystal (1990), 20.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, 22.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 20.

families and the Al-Sabah rulers was established on the basis of a balance of interests, where as long as the merchants accepted Al-Sabah power, the Al-Sabah rulers tolerated the merchant families' financial supremacy and heeded their political demands.⁴²⁷

This arrangement constituted the basis of Al-Sabah rule and led to four main distinctive attributes: first, the Al-Sabah ruler was not seen as a superior power, but rather as fulfilling a particular function as part of a necessary division of labour within a growing economy and society.⁴²⁸ Meanwhile, the merchants were in control of trade and imports, which provided finance for the ruler. The merchants thus viewed the Al-Sabah ruler as merely one among equals, and it was often the case that the rulers were personally indebted to the merchants, who financed their commercial as well as political endeavours.⁴²⁹ This functional partnership between the Al-Sabah family and the merchant families was based on 'representation with taxation'; it was the tax revenues generated by the merchant families' activities that sustained the ruler and his administration.⁴³⁰ Second, the Al-Sabah ruler was tasked with looking after the interests of the town as a whole, and not with promoting the interests of his family. This attribute specifically dictates that the ruler should not deem himself superior or regard other groups or families as his or his family's subjects. The Al-Sabah family did not rule as a group or a coalition; rather, power resided in the ruler alone. The strategy of placing family members in powerful

⁴²⁷ Yom, S. (2011). Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability: the Origins and Persistence of Popular Rentierism in Kuwait. *Studies in Comparative International Development*. 46(2), 217–241. 225.

⁴²⁸ Salem (2007).

⁴²⁹ Yom (2011), 225.

⁴³⁰ Salem (2007).

positions was yet to be adopted by the Al-Sabah rulers.⁴³¹ Third, the administration of the town was not based only on political affairs, but was managed on the basis of a balance between the political, economic and civilian domains. The implication of this attribute is to highlight the communal aspect of life in the town, where each area was integral to the administration and management of society as a whole. Fourth, the rule of the Al-Sabah was not imposed by force, but rather by consent and agreement. The Al-Sabah rulers were never regarded as autocratic despots; their power was usually limited by custom and the checks exercised by the strong merchant oligarchy.⁴³² The traditional decision-making apparatus was firmly established within the context of consultation (*Shura*) where the ruler did not have absolute power. Taken together, these four distinctive attributes epitomise Kuwaiti politics.

In 1899, under the leadership of Kuwait's seventh Al-Sabah ruler, Sheikh Mubarak the Great,⁴³³ Kuwait signed a strategic treaty with the British that incorporated it into the 'Trucial system'.⁴³⁴ Sheikh Mubarak signed further agreements with the British, including a guarantee letter stating that Great Britain would ensure the defence of Kuwait if attacked by a foreign power.⁴³⁵ In around 1908, Sheikh Mubarak utilised his newfound support from the British to impose a more authoritarian style of domestic politics, and as

⁴³¹ The British had a hand in that, where they advised the Kuwaiti ruler to utilise family members to form an alliance against political dissent. More details later in the chapter.

⁴³² Salih, K. (1991). Kuwait: political consequences of modernization, 1750–1986. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 27(1), 46–66.

⁴³³ Mubarak the Great left the deepest legacy of all the earlier Al-Sabah rulers; he was dubbed 'the founder of modern Kuwait'.

⁴³⁴ Long et al. (2010), 119.

⁴³⁵ Abu-Hakima (1982).

a consequence, dismantled the structure of cooperative partnership between the Al-Sabah family and the merchant family oligarchy.⁴³⁶ In an attempt to marginalise merchant interests, Sheikh Mubarak raised the rents of merchant shops and levied new boat taxes and customs duties, which elicited drastic resistance from the merchant community. The wealthiest businessmen protested by relocating to Bahrain and Qatar while threatening to withdraw their hundreds of vessels and labour crews.⁴³⁷ Their absence proved to be highly disruptive – leaving the settlement and taking their wealth with them had significantly reduced the economic and military strength of Kuwait.⁴³⁸ Mubarak ultimately rescinded his taxes and personally appealed for the merchants' return, which led to waves of protest and dissent and culminated in the earliest demands for a written constitution.⁴³⁹

In 1921, after the death of Sheikh Mubarak (he had died in 1915) and the subsequent short-term rule of his two sons, a group of leading notables asserted the right of the community to resolve succession crises within the Al-Sabah family.⁴⁴⁰ The practice of the consent of the people in the nomination of their ruler reflected “an unwritten social contract between the ruler and citizens that obedience would not be granted except after a promise of consultation”.⁴⁴¹ The group organised themselves into a council and submitted a petition to the Al-Sabah family demanding their right to advise on the administration of the country, and specifically, on the right of the community to resolve the succession

⁴³⁶ Salem (2007).

⁴³⁷ Yom (2011), 225.

⁴³⁸ Crystal (1990), 21.

⁴³⁹ Salem (2007).

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Assiri, A. (2007). The 2006 Parliamentary Election in Kuwait: a New Age in Political Participation. *Digest Of Middle East Studies*, 16(2), 22–44.

crisis within the Al-Sabah family.⁴⁴² The council was composed of twelve notables representing the east and west sides of the city; they demanded that the ruling family select from among three contenders within the Al-Sabah family that they had approved. After consultation, the Al-Sabah family selected one of the contenders, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jabir, who would rule until his death in 1950. Sheikh Ahmad agreed to govern with the advice of a council; however, within two months of assuming the role of leader, he abandoned the council and ignored demands for political participation.⁴⁴³ Although the council was short-lived, it did generate a highly politicised merchant community and formed the basic foundation for public participation in decision making in Kuwait.⁴⁴⁴

a. The 1938 *Majlis* Crisis

In 1938, the small and well-organised Majlis⁴⁴⁵ movement emerged with the aim of establishing a legislative council at the centre of Kuwait's governing structure. The group consisted of merchants and educated Kuwaitis who presented the ruler with a petition demanding of reform of local conditions by the election of a new council that would assist the ruler in managing the affairs of the country.⁴⁴⁶ The geopolitical context of the 1930s greatly influenced the emergence of the Majlis movement, where the Kuwaiti economy was negatively impacted by the collapse of the pearling sector and diminishing

⁴⁴² Crystal (1990), 21.

⁴⁴³ Tétreault, M. (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait. In Tétreault M., Okruhlik, G. & Kapiszewski, A. *Political change in the Arab Gulf States: stuck in transition*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

⁴⁴⁴ Assiri (2007).

⁴⁴⁵ Majlis stands for 'council'.

⁴⁴⁶ Assiri (2007).

foreign trade. Moreover, a Saudi economic blockade from 1923–1937 had deepened economic hardship in Kuwait. King Abdulaziz Bin Saud, the founder and ruler of Saudi Arabia, initiated the blockade as a result of alleged tax evasion by the reigning Kuwaiti ruler, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Sabah.⁴⁴⁷ Fortunately, it was during this time that the British discovered oil deposits in Kuwait. In 1938, Sheikh Ahmad signed a concession treaty allowing the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), a new Anglo-American establishment, to drill for oil in return for annual royalty payments.⁴⁴⁸

The disbursement of these initial funds became a source of dissent between the old merchant families and the Al-Sabah rulers. Public pressure mounted, calling for the creation of a legislative council. Two local institutions founded by the merchant elders became the mouthpiece of dissent against the Al-Sabah rulers: the Education Council established in 1936 and the Municipality Board.⁴⁴⁹ The Municipality Board generated the first hint of the Majlis movement that ultimately took shape in 1938 when a group of merchants secretly met to draw up a list of reforms and circulated them via leaflets and anti-government graffiti.⁴⁵⁰ The government initially responded to the Majlis movement harshly, with the arrest and beating of one of the main dissidents. However, the Al-Sabah ruler ultimately consented to the demand for the establishment of a legislative assembly. A restricted election took place among 150 elite families in June 1938, with the objective

⁴⁴⁷ Sheikh Ahmad had refused to collect taxes from the Najdi Bedouins who would purchase their food and clothing at the Kuwait market certain seasons each year and return the year after to pay for what they had bought not in cash but in sheep or camels. Abdulaziz claimed that this type of trade robbed his treasury of a huge income. In Abu-Hakima (1982), 155.

⁴⁴⁸ Yom (2011), 225.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Crystal (1990), 21.

of electing Kuwait's first legislative council made up of 14 members representing equally the two districts within the town. The newly elected Majlis chose a reformist within the ruling family, Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem Al-Sabah, as their president due to his democratic inclinations and positive relationship with the nationalists.⁴⁵¹ The Majlis issued the founding document of the Kuwaiti Constitution, providing the basic law which balanced the executive, legislative and judicial powers. The constitutional document consisted of five articles that were accepted by the ruler on July 2, 1938.

*The document asserted that the people were the source of all authority, that they were represented by their elected deputies, that the National Assembly alone had the right to produce legislation, and that all treaties and concessions must go through the National Assembly.*⁴⁵²

To some Kuwaiti scholars, this document represents Kuwait's first constitution.⁴⁵³ The document stipulated that the legislative assembly would be authorised to legislate on all matters of concern to the country, including budget, justice, general security, education, health, housing and states of emergency. Article 3 specifically stated that all internal concessions, leases, and monopolies, as well as external agreements and treaties, should not be considered legal and binding unless approved by the elected legislative assembly.⁴⁵⁴ This was clearly aimed at restraining the ruler's control of oil revenues. The British and the oil companies had begun exploring for oil deposits and were anxious to

⁴⁵¹ Assiri (2007).

⁴⁵² Salem (2007).

⁴⁵³ Baaklini, A. (1982). Legislatures in the Gulf Area: The Experience of Kuwait, 1961–1976. *International Journal Of Middle East Studies*. 14(03), 359–379.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

acquire concessions from the Emir. The Majlis was soon dismantled when it demanded control over the KOC oil royalties; the reigning Sheikh Ahmad considered that this particular demand was a red line not to be crossed. He believed that surrendering control over oil royalties would eventually lead to the downfall of his family's regime. Hence, in December of 1938, Sheikh Ahmed called on his tribal supporters to arm and disband the Majlis by force. The Education Council and the Municipality Board were also disbanded, sparking public clashes and seemingly ending the democratic challenge.⁴⁵⁵ The authority and viability of new political bodies and councils ceased until independence in 1961.⁴⁵⁶

There are two main outcomes of the Majlis crisis of 1938. The first was that the Al-Sabah rulers continued cultivating the turbulent relationship with the merchant and trading class, regardless of the fact that they almost terminated their dynasty. Instead of destroying this antagonistic class to prevent more rebellions, the ruler took the opposite path:

*By the early 1940s, Ahmad had freed most jailed Majlis activists and amnestied exiled dissidents. The old pact returned. The al-Sabah government continued to tolerate the merchant and trading caste, which in retaining its assets and mobility remained an integral part of Kuwaiti society on the eve of the oil age. This coalitional shift back to bargained acceptance was a forced move that exposed the logic of regime survival in harrowing circumstances.*⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Yom (2011), 225.

⁴⁵⁶ Assiri (2007).

⁴⁵⁷ Yom (2011), 225.

After the dismantling of the Majlis, the merchants remained an integral part of the country's economic prosperity. The government could not afford to lose the fiscal backbone of the country by destroying its most productive class; neither could it rely on the British to reconfigure the domestic balance of power. When the Majlis had demanded more control, Sheikh Ahmed had turned to the British for support, only to be rebuffed as the British political agent⁴⁵⁸ at the time considered it as an internal dispute that did not merit an intervention (more on the British role in the Majlis crisis below). Hence, Sheikh Ahmed's most realistic chance of sustaining his rule was to keep his relationship with the merchants as his predecessors had from half a century earlier.⁴⁵⁹

The second main outcome of the Majlis crisis in 1938 was that it forced Sheikh Ahmad to reach out to domestic allies, heralding a sedentarisation process that constituted a major shift in the Al-Sabah's social alliances. During the crisis, Sheikh Ahmad had rallied expected support from loyal Bedouin tribes, yet he also capitalised on discontent among the Shi'a minority, who comprised a fifth of the population, by assuring them of protected status under his rule. Many Shi'a feared restrictions under the all-Sunni Majlis when it seemed to show its hand by dismissing Sheikh Ahmed's personal secretary, who happened to be a prominent Shi'a. The ruler further engaged with the maritime labour force and other poor workers, promising them better security over their livelihoods. The Al-Sabah began to recognise that these domestic groups needed to be courted as sources of political support in case another similar crisis should occur:

“Given that the possibility of endemic future opposition, the Kuwaiti leadership looked

⁴⁵⁸ The British Empire had placed political agents throughout the region as part of the Trucial agreement with the reigning sheikhs.

⁴⁵⁹ Yom (2011), 225.

upon these domestic groups no longer as passive social units, but rather as sources of political support that needed to be engaged and captured.”⁴⁶⁰

b. The British–Kuwaiti Relationship

The colonial relationship between Great Britain and the Kuwaiti leadership certainly influenced the development of the political system in Kuwait. The most important example was during Sheikh Mubarak the Great’s reign, when he entered into a protected-state relationship with the British over concerns about Ottoman political control, in 1899.⁴⁶¹ The Ottomans had their eye on Kuwait’s strategic location as a possible “terminus for the Berlin–Baghdad railway”.⁴⁶² The Ottomans were also attracted to Kuwait’s lucrative trade due to the strategic location of its port. Meanwhile, the impetus for the British to sign a treaty with Sheikh Mubarak was the Berlin–Baghdad railway – they wanted to retain their dominance in face of other powers (mainly Europeans and the Ottomans) within the region. The British signed additional treaties with Sheikh Mubarak that gave them significant control over Kuwait’s foreign policy. The signing of the treaties benefited both parties. For Sheikh Mubarak, the British protectorate limited Ottoman interest in Kuwait, while for the British, adding Kuwait to their Trucial

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 228.

⁴⁶¹ Long et al. (2010), 119.

⁴⁶² Tètreault, M. (1991). Autonomy, necessity, and the small state: ruling Kuwait in the twentieth century. *International Organization*. 45(04). 565–591.

Agreements⁴⁶³ extended their control within the region and reinforced their power relative to European rivals.

In 1922, the British protectors negotiated away half of Kuwait's territory to Saudi Arabia and Iraq in the Treaty of Uqair.⁴⁶⁴ The treaty represents a key reason for the subsequent survival of the Al-Sabah regime in face of both Saudi and Iraqi territorial claims for decades to come.⁴⁶⁵ Sheikh Mubarak also personally benefited financially from Kuwait's protectorate status: "each time an agreement was signed, a monetary payment from Britain to Mubarak went along with it to seal the bargain."⁴⁶⁶ British payments to Sheikh Mubarak contributed to his ability to hire and maintain an armed guard to protect him from domestic groups who might otherwise attempt a coup. Resources provided by the British also allowed him to become independent of the merchants⁴⁶⁷ – "to free himself from the necessity of behaving nicely in order to get their financial support".⁴⁶⁸ The most important personal gain from protectorate status was British alignment with his plan "to limit the future rulers of Kuwait to his sons and their offspring, cutting off other branches of the Al-Sabah".⁴⁶⁹ The British had promised Sheikh Mubarak that they would support his designated heir as long as he upheld the agreements, and that "they were prepared to

⁴⁶³ The Trucial Agreements were signed by the rulers of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman Ras Al Khaimah and Umm Al Quwain.

⁴⁶⁴ Long et al. (2010), 119.

⁴⁶⁵ At least until the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

⁴⁶⁶ Tètreault (1991).

⁴⁶⁷ These resources were the date gardens in Iraq which became the foundation of the family's wealth. In Tètreault (1991).

⁴⁶⁸ Tètreault (1991).

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

intervene quietly, if necessary, to ensure that the rulership passed to Mubarak's eldest son, Jabir, upon his death".⁴⁷⁰

Under the reign of Sheikh Mubarak's second son, Sheikh Ahmed al Jaber, the British had a crucial impact on the domestic politics of Kuwait. During the 1938 Majlis crisis, the British advised Sheikh Ahmed to mobilise support against the Majlis. Although the British supported Sheikh Ahmed, their control did not extend in any sense to control over the population; it was the local ruler who dominated over domestic social groups. The British, for their part, advised Sheikh Ahmed to consult with and rely on family members, and he obliged. By December 1928, Ahmed had appointed family members to "superior posts in all departments".⁴⁷¹ Hence, "the result was to mobilise the Al-Sabah as a clan in support of the ruler and the regime by identifying the political and economic interests of family members with the continuation of the family's role as provider of the leaders of the state."⁴⁷² This led to the key transition to inclusion of members of the Al-Sabah family in the ruling of the country.

The relationship between Britain and Kuwait changed after the expansion of Kuwait's oil industry and the decline of Britain as a world power after WWII. After the shutdown of the Iranian oil fields in 1951, Kuwait developed into a main source of British supply, providing around 38% of its total imports in terms of volume in 1960.⁴⁷³ As a result, the British economy became heavily dependent on the stability and security of Kuwait. The British Petroleum Company (BP) owned 50% of the KOC; they had received a

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Mangold, P. (1975). Britain and the Defence of Kuwait, 1956–71. *The RUSI Journal*, 120(3), 44–48.

concession in 1934 and consequently discovered oil in 1938. However, the first commercial quantities were not exported until after WWII.⁴⁷⁴ “Oil revenues doubled in 1952 and again in 1953, straining the domestic relationships within Kuwait, as well as the relationship between Kuwait and Britain.”⁴⁷⁵ The Al-Sabah family resented British claims over their oil revenues, and unlike his predecessor, the reigning Sheikh Abdulla Al-Salim Al-Sabah had no personal investment in his relationship with the British. Hence, “Abdullah Salim engineered Kuwait’s transition from a British client to a state dependent on oil revenues for the security of nation and regime.”⁴⁷⁶ In 1960, the ruler requested the abrogation of the 1899 Treaty. On June 19, 1961, the treaty was replaced by an Exchange of Letters, which reaffirmed the close friendship between the two countries, and declared an end to Kuwait’s position as a British Protectorate.⁴⁷⁷

c. Oil and the Domestic Politics of the Al-Sabahs

The discovery of oil in 1938 and the distribution of its revenues during the 1950s prompted Kuwait’s development of new economic structures and the establishment of a welfare system that radically upgraded the lives of inhabitants from poverty to prosperity. In 1946, Kuwait’s oil income was not more than \$760,000; however, by 1971, it had risen to \$963 million, and by 1979 to \$8.9 billion.⁴⁷⁸ It is during this rapid economic

⁴⁷⁴ Long et al. (2010), 119.

⁴⁷⁵ Tètreault (1991).

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Hijazi, A. (1964). Kuwait: Development from a Semitribal, Semicolonial Society to Democracy and Sovereignty. *The American Journal Of Comparative Law*, 13(3), 428–438.

⁴⁷⁸ Ghabra, S. (1997). Kuwait and the Dynamics of Socio-Economic Change. *The Middle East Journal*. 51(3). 358–372.

development that new social forces emerged in Kuwait. The distribution of oil revenues to citizens seemed a reasonable strategy in controlling domestic politics, from the perspective of the Al-Sabah rulers. The oil revenues not only enabled the ruler to buy off domestic elites and retain his independence from the merchant class as the source of state income, but also created a huge constituency that supported his regime through the establishment of the welfare system.⁴⁷⁹ The immediate consequence of the oil revenues was the breakdown of the historical alliance binding the ruling family with the merchant oligarchy. Prior to the discovery of oil, the merchants had provided the ruling family with most of its income through taxes. The oil revenues, however, positioned the monarchy as the sole distributor of oil wealth and ultimately reversed the relationship of economic dependency.⁴⁸⁰

*The external nature of oil rents, the enclave nature of the industry, and the size of the boom spared rulers the need to extract, through taxation and repression, economic and social resources allocated through other (tribal, religious, but especially mercantile) networks of obligation, freeing the rulers from their historical, economically based dependence on the merchants.*⁴⁸¹

The oil revenues enabled the government to repay all its debts to the merchant class; however, the regime was apprehensive that such repayment might eliminate the merchants' strong presence in the country's political, economic, and social realms. Hence, rather than marginalise the merchants, the government engaged their interests by

⁴⁷⁹ Tétreault (1991).

⁴⁸⁰ Salih (1991).

⁴⁸¹ Crystal, J. (1989). Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar. *Comparative Politics*, 21(4), 427–443.

way of a deliberate strategy to maintain their support. The ruler “chose to restore the merchant’s economic relevance, co-opting former enemies by transforming them into conditional loyalists”.⁴⁸² In other words, the merchant class was bought off by the state.

One of the strategies included the land acquisition programme, which transferred state funds to merchant elites through unregulated property sales. Through this programme, which continued from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, the government channelled up to \$6.5 million to the eighty wealthiest merchant and trading families. The government further ceded virtual monopolies to new merchant firms in the fields of banking, real estate, and retail, with capital injections, trade measures, and other state protections constantly boosting their conglomerates. The Al-Sabah family further excluded their own participation in the private sector, thus removing the prospect of competition with merchant enterprises. This created a new balance between capital and politics: by leaving the non-oil economy to the merchant elites, the government could claim state offices as their exclusive domain.⁴⁸³ The new relationship between the Al-Sabah family and the merchant class had positioned the merchants into no longer making a claim to power within the political system, as they had in the past. On the other hand, these strategies financially strengthened the merchants as a class, and convinced them that once the British protectorate ended, their economic opportunities would increase and the sectors of the economy that had been dominated by British nationals would be available to them to exploit. “In 1960, the shape of this future exploitation was indicated by the passage of the

⁴⁸² Yom (2011), 225.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

Law of Commercial Companies, which required that 51 percent of all companies in Kuwait be owned by Kuwaitis.”⁴⁸⁴

Oil revenues also gave the Al-Sabah family the financial and institutional resources to rally a diverse coalition through the establishment of an extensive welfare system: “a larger sector of the population was wooed by the construction of a welfare state whose benefits included free housing, utilities, education, and medical care.”⁴⁸⁵ Through Kuwait’s welfare system, the government is constitutionally obliged to care for the young, the old, the ill, and the disabled; it is also obliged to provide public education and public health. These rights are limited to Kuwaiti citizens, while the remainder of the population has few political and civil rights and enjoys only restricted access to the benefits of the state welfare system.⁴⁸⁶ The Kuwaiti welfare institution played a huge role in the nation-building process; as the government spent a massive amount of the oil revenues on extensive benefits for its citizens, it also provided them with security, law and order, and an overall collective *national* identity. In other words, the government established the Kuwaiti welfare state in order to promote nationalism, where the allegiance of citizens is extended towards the state, rather than a tribe, clan or ethnic group. Through the welfare programme, the state takes over the traditional task of the

⁴⁸⁴ Tètreault (1991).

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Parolin, G. (2006). Generations of Gulf Constitutions: Paths and Perspectives. In Khalaf, A. & Luciani, G. *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*. Dubai: Gulf Research Center.

tribe, to which was to provide individuals and families with security, thus shifting loyalties from tribe to nation.⁴⁸⁷

III. Kuwaiti Citizenship and Social Divisions

The disposition of the ethnic and social demographics of Kuwait is a major factor in the development of the Kuwaiti political system. Indeed, the rulers' approach to the control and manipulation of the various social groups is a significant characteristic of the political rule of the Al-Sabah. Kuwaiti society is complex, with diverse and often overlapping distinctions along confessional, historical, political, and national lines.⁴⁸⁸ At present, the population of Kuwait is almost 4 million, with expatriates accounting for 69% and Kuwaitis for around 31%.⁴⁸⁹ The total population consists 77% of Muslims, 17% of Christians and 6% unspecified.⁴⁹⁰ The majority of Kuwait citizens are Muslim, with around 70% Sunnis and 30% Shi'a.⁴⁹¹ The expatriates consist of Arabs and non-Arabs; Arabs come from all over the Middle East and North Africa, with the largest group being Egyptians. The non-Arabs are mainly from the Asian continent: India, Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka; and a minority from Iran and the

⁴⁸⁷ Longva, A. (2006). "Nationalism In Pre-Modern Guise: The Discourse On Hadhar And Badu In Kuwait." *International Journal Of Middle East Studies MES*, 38(02), 171.

⁴⁸⁸ Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Center for Applied Policy Research. (2014). BTI 2014: Kuwait Country Report. Munich University.

⁴⁸⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. (2016). The World Factbook: Kuwait.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Shultziner, D. & Tétreault, M. A. (2012). Representation And Democratic Progress In Kuwait. *Representation*, 48(3), 281–293.

Western countries – Europeans, Americans and Australians.⁴⁹² Within the 6% unspecified is a significant population of ‘stateless persons’, or *Bidoon*, who total around 150,000–180,000.⁴⁹³ The term ‘Bidoon’ means ‘without’, and more specifically in Kuwait it means ‘without nationality’ (the situation of the Bidoon will be discussed later in the chapter).

There are significant social divisions within Kuwaiti society; the main two being the sectarian division between Sunnis and Shi’a,⁴⁹⁴ and the urban–tribal division between the *Hadhar* (‘city people’) and the *Bedouins* (‘tribespeople’).⁴⁹⁵ The term ‘Hadhar’ is designated to Kuwaitis whose forefathers lived in Kuwait before the advent of the oil era in 1946 and worked as traders, sailors, fishermen and pearl divers.⁴⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the term ‘Bedouins’ is mainly designated to a specific group of newcomers: immigrants who arrived in Kuwait between the 1960s and the 1980s from Saudi Arabia. The Bedouins and the Hadhar originate from the same North Arabian tribes;⁴⁹⁷ however, differences emerged between the two groups on the basis of the time of settlement – the Bedouins who lived in Kuwait before the 1950s are considered as Hadhar. Further social divisions include distinctions between citizens and non-citizens, such as the expatriates and the

⁴⁹² Longva, A. (2005). “Neither Autocracy nor Democracy but Ethnocracy: Citizens, Expatriates and the Socio-Political System in Kuwait”, in Piscatori, J. P., & Dresch, P. *Monarchies and Nations: Globalization and Identity in the Arab states of the Gulf*. London: I. B. Tauris.

⁴⁹³ Human Rights Watch. (1995). *The Bedoons of Kuwait*.

⁴⁹⁴ The division between Shia and Sunni Muslims goes back to the seventh century; when Prophet Mohammed passed away in 632 A.D., the Muslim community began to disagree over the question of who would succeed the Prophet. Such disagreement became the basis of the division between two great sects – the Shi’a and the Sunni – within Islam.

⁴⁹⁵ Shultziner and Tétreault (2012).

⁴⁹⁶ Longva (2006), 171.

⁴⁹⁷ “The tribes of Anaiza, Mutayr, Ajman, Otaiba, Shammar, etc.”, in Longva (2006), 171.

Bidoon; and political divisions such as Liberals versus Islamists. All are examples of overlapping groups that shape the Kuwaiti political system.⁴⁹⁸ The Kuwaiti Constitution does not recognise the existence of political parties, and although societal distinctions are not translated into a political party spectrum, citizens' socio-religious-political identities are relatively important within political life.⁴⁹⁹

Table 2: Kuwait's Main Social and Ethnic Divisions⁵⁰⁰

Sunni vs. Shi'a
Hadhar vs. Bedouins
Citizens (First/Second Categories) vs. Expatriates/Bidoon
Liberal vs. Islamist
Men vs. Women

The most salient division within the population is between citizens and non-citizens. According to Anh Longva, the presence of foreign workers (known as expatriates) in Kuwait, whose number has consistently been greater than that of the native population since the 1970s, highlights the focus of Kuwaiti citizenship as the basis of exclusion. Longva argues that it is the presence of expatriates and their legal, social, and political subjection to Kuwaiti citizens that allows for the reproduction of a political structure with quasi-autocratic features.⁵⁰¹ In the modern democratic practice, political rights are

⁴⁹⁸ Ghabra (1997).

⁴⁹⁹ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

⁵⁰⁰ Ghabra (1997); Longva (2006), 171; Shultziner and Tétreault (2012).

⁵⁰¹ Longva (2005).

‘universal’ in the sense that they are held by all adult citizens, regardless of gender, race, class and cultural background; the essential requirement being citizenship. Hence, “non-citizens are lawfully denied political rights on the principle that the exercise of such rights is indissolubly associated with the nation-state, which constitutes the natural frame for their practice.”⁵⁰² This national principle leads to important implications for the status of non-citizens all over the world, where they find themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic structure and unable to exercise political rights. “They depend for their protection on the goodwill of the host country and on the ability and readiness of the authorities of their native countries to intervene in their favour.”⁵⁰³

In Kuwait, the vulnerability of non-citizens and their lack of security have a particular significance because of their sheer number. Thus, the demographic imbalance between citizens and expatriates in Kuwait plays a major role in the constitution of the Kuwaiti national identity. The exclusion of expatriates involves their being excluded from basic rights such as property ownership and basic duties such as tax payment or military service. In Kuwait, neither nationals nor expatriates pay personal income tax; however, the right to own real estate belongs exclusively to Kuwaiti nationals. Furthermore, the expatriates in Kuwait are imported for the sole purpose of serving the native minority, and are thus labelled as a non-national underclass which “depends for its identity as well as its material well being”⁵⁰⁴ on the native minority. Longva argues that academics who focus on democratisation in the Gulf region fail to appreciate the social, psychological,

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

and political impact that a majority population of rightless migrant workers can have on the way this privileged minority conceptualise and practice political rights among themselves. She thus describes Kuwait as a ‘civic ethnocracy’, (ethnocracy is defined as government by an ethnic group); she asserts that in Kuwait and the rest of the Gulf region, the defining feature is not race, language or religion, but citizenship conceived in terms of shared descent. While all ethnocracies may be described as involving domination through exclusion, civic ethnocracy is when exclusion is practised on the basis of citizenship.

The impact of the oil economy has further established Kuwait’s civic ethnocracy by reinforcing the notion of Kuwaiti nationality and pre-oil social stratification: “It has been said often enough that the evasive presence of foreign workers is a problem, even a scourge, for Kuwait, yet this ‘scourge’ plays a critical role in displacing the social tensions that inevitably arise when a traditional society is faced with rapid transformations, as is the case in the Gulf region.”⁵⁰⁵ Within a generation, Kuwait went from being one of the world’s poorest nations to being one of the richest; and during this process, many basic features of its society were transformed. Sea and caravan trade were no longer practised; neither was nomadism. “Sailors, pearl-divers and nomadic shepherds have turned into state employees working in offices and living in air-conditioned houses distributed by the government.”⁵⁰⁶ Another crucial impact of the advent of oil is the end of the Al-Sabah ruling family’s dependence on the merchants, where roles were reversed and the merchants became dependent on the rulers’ willingness to create and maintain

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

conditions favourable to their businesses. However, against the backdrop of all the changes generated by the oil economy, the social stratification that characterised Kuwait in its pre-oil days has remained intact since Kuwait's independence in 1961:

*... the social prestige that surrounds the old merchant families has remained unchanged...Like the Al-Sabah, this mercantile aristocracy practice class endogamy. With the ruling family and the big merchants controlling access to political and economic power respectively, the rest of the population is kept in the role of clients to these patrons ...*⁵⁰⁷

Longva highlights the continued reproduction of the pre-oil power structure as a key feature in Kuwait's present political system; she gives two explanations with regard to the concept of citizenry in Kuwait. First, education and other social improvements have not led to social mobility, where each individual has the opportunity to work their way upwards, moving freely across class boundaries. "Upward mobility has indeed taken place in Kuwait, but in a collective fashion, with the Kuwaiti class structure as a whole being lifted upward through the introduction at the bottom of the hierarchy of a new underclass, the foreign workers."⁵⁰⁸ The social divisions remain the same as in the pre-oil era; however, the working class now has an ethnic underclass beneath it, leading to the whole of Kuwaiti citizenry enjoying a higher collective status. This leads to her second explanation: "whatever sense of unease and powerlessness is engendered by social

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

change is to a certain degree counteracted by the unique sense of empowerment derived from domination over the migrant underclass.”⁵⁰⁹

Hence, even though oil has brought Kuwaitis material comfort and the welfare system, if they had built their welfare state with their own hands (built their own houses and highways and manned the desalination and electrical plants that ensure the daily supply of water and electricity), demands for greater social and political equality among citizens would have been louder and more persistent. The expatriates not only relieve citizens of the burden of physical nation-building, “they ensure that each Kuwaiti citizen enjoys a measure of middle-class status and a feeling of empowerment.”⁵¹⁰ Combined with the fact that they are a minority within their own country, “this gratifying experience helps convince Kuwaitis that there is more to gain in accepting the *status quo* than in trying to challenge it.”⁵¹¹ Thus, the presence of expatriates has had a twofold impact on political development in Kuwait. On the one hand, the government has had to take special measures in furnishing Kuwaiti citizens, who have become a minority in their own country, with greater privileges (such as the welfare system). Such privileges have led to the alienation of the expatriates, who were the backbone of the rapid transformation of Kuwait’s economy and society. Meanwhile, the presence of the large percentage of expatriates “has accentuated political fragmentation and has hindered the process of

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

integration essential to healthy political development”.⁵¹² The participation of expatriates in the political system seemingly could come only at the expense of the monarchy.⁵¹³

Due to the influx of foreign skills into the country, the government undertook defensive measures on behalf of its citizens, the most important of which was the 1959 nationalisation law, which restricted the granting of Kuwaiti citizenship to those residents who had lived in the state continuously since 1920. Throughout the 1950s, the government institutionalised preferential treatment based on nationality through a series of nationality laws. “State benefits and services were available exclusively or preferentially to Kuwaitis....Public housing segregated non-nationals.”⁵¹⁴ Thus, the government created a sharp difference between citizens and non-citizens and essentially, this differentiation became a key characteristic of the Kuwaiti national identity. The Al-Sabah rulers have administered the institution of citizenship to create a dividing line in the population, where the citizen is granted welfare benefits and opportunities that differentiate him from the non-citizen. They further devised a stratification system where the traditional social classes remained, while creating a foreign underclass that would provide an aura of privilege around the citizens. As the expatriate population grew, the government developed stricter nationality laws to regulate the special treatment of Kuwaitis.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² Salih (1991).

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Crystal (1990), 20.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

a. The Nationality Law of 1959

The first attempt at defining the requirements for extending the Kuwaiti nationality was made two years after the advent of the oil industry in 1948; residents whose ancestors had been in Kuwait since 1899 were defined as citizens, including children who were born in Kuwait to non-Kuwaitis. The government also announced that Arabs or Muslims residing in Kuwait for up to ten years could apply for citizenship. In 1957 Kuwait's first census revealed, however, that foreigners who immigrated to the country for work opportunities constituted 45% of the population. Hence, a more restrictive nationality law was passed in 1959 that eliminated the options of citizenship by birthright or long-term residence.⁵¹⁶ Under the Nationality Law of 1959, Kuwaiti nationals were defined as those persons and descendants who resided in Kuwait prior to 1920 and maintained residence there until 1959. Those who arrived in Kuwait after 1945 had to complete at least twenty years of residency and satisfy certain other criteria such as being fluent in Arabic, being capable of earning a living, and being a Muslim before applying for citizenship.⁵¹⁷

The 1959 Nationality Law also provided an official ranking of citizens to distinguish between 'original' Kuwaitis (*bil ta'sees*) and Kuwaitis 'by naturalisation' (*bil tajnees*).⁵¹⁸ It created fixed categories of Kuwaiti citizens according to the duration of their residence. The 'original' Kuwaitis were those whose descendants had settled in Kuwait since 1920; they received 'first category' citizenship (*il jinsiya il 'oula*) that granted them full political rights and social benefits. Kuwaitis 'by naturalisation' were those who could

⁵¹⁶ Al-Nakib (2014).

⁵¹⁷ Tetreault, M. and Al-Mughni, H. (1995). Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 22, No.1/2, pp. 64–80.

⁵¹⁸ Longva (2005).

obtain Kuwaiti nationality through ‘naturalisation’: Arabs and non-Arabs (mostly Persians) living in Kuwait prior to 1945 and maintaining residence there until the law was promulgated in 1959. Those Kuwaitis who became citizens through naturalisation were classified differently from original Kuwaitis, who held first category citizenship.⁵¹⁹ Naturalised citizens were granted ‘second category’ citizenship (*il jinsiya il thanya*), which, while providing them with equal rights to employment, land ownership and welfare benefits, stripped them of their political rights, such as voting and running for parliament (they were also excluded from senior level positions in government). The distinction between original and naturalised Kuwaitis was developed in order to confine political rights to a small percentage of the population; the more citizens with political rights, the more political participants within the political system, which might lead to an increase of demands for reform.⁵²⁰ The fact that exclusion from political rights is the only difference between the first and second categories of citizenship indicates that the Kuwaiti ruling elite utilised the inclusion and exclusion of rights as a strategy of control and manipulation of the political system.

The division between first and second category citizens is not as steep as the division between citizens and non-citizens or the Bidoon. However, it is important to explain the reason behind the division in citizenship in this research, not least because it is a political one. The exact percentage of the division (between first and second category citizens) is not easily obtained; however, the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* estimates that 80% of Kuwaiti citizens have first category citizenship, while 20% have second. The

⁵¹⁹ Al-Nakib (2014).

⁵²⁰ Ghabra (1997).

division “does not correspond to religious sects”,⁵²¹ but rather relates to the time of settlement. Dividing citizens into first and second categories is a strategy used by the ruling family to restrict political participation. Kuwaiti citizens with second category citizenship are not permitted to participate in parliamentary elections (they can neither vote nor run) until twenty years after their naturalisation. Other exclusions from the right to vote include membership of the armed forces, the police, women (until 2005) and persons who have been convicted of a felony.⁵²² Such limitations ensure a smaller percentage of eligible Kuwaiti voters in parliamentary elections; thus enabling the rulers to control and manipulate election results. The concept of citizenship is, therefore, distinguishable from the concept of nationality – the notion of a national community suggest an inclusiveness that is contradicted by the inequalities of citizenship. Thus, in the Kuwaiti case, having Kuwaiti nationality does not translate into being a full ‘citizen’ in terms of equality of political and economic opportunity.⁵²³

The Nationality Law of 1959 also brought about the historical distinction between the *Hadhar* (urban people) and the *Badu* or the *Bedouin* (tribespeople). Among those who obtained first category citizenship are the Hadhar; the term ‘Hadhar’ refers to those who had been settled in the Kuwaiti towns and villages before the beginning of the oil industry. Their origins are in the same North Arabian tribes⁵²⁴ to which the majority of the

⁵²¹ Hatem, R. & Gildea, D. (2011). Kuwaiti Shia: Government Policies, Societal Cleavages, and The Non-Factor of Iran. *The Institute for Middle East Studies*. The George Washington University.

⁵²² *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

⁵²³ Partrick, N. (2009). Nationalism in the Gulf States. *Kuwait Programme On Development, Governance And Globalisation in the Gulf States*. London School of Economics and Political Science. 20.

⁵²⁴ “The tribes of Anaiza, Mutayr, Ajman, Otaiba, Shammar, etc.”, in Longva (2006).

Bedouin immigrants belong; however, the timing of their settlement in Kuwait, prior to oil, establishes them as those who built Kuwait into what it is today. At the top of Hadhar society are the Sunni merchant families who founded Kuwait in the early 18th century.⁵²⁵ Prior to the discovery of oil, the merchant oligarchy had provided the ruling family with most of its income through taxes. They were the main source of revenue for the Al-Sabah rulers and they had an important role in the country's development. During the 19th century, the merchants travelled to India, Iraq, Persia, Syria, and Yemen and brought back a variety of goods to Kuwait. They were the basis of civil society in the city, where they established the first school in 1911 and another in 1920. They also opened the first library in 1920 and produced the first magazine in 1928.⁵²⁶ Thus, it was mostly their contribution to Kuwaiti society before independence that granted them first-category status.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the government granted second-category citizenship to approximately 220,000 people, the overwhelmingly majority of them Bedouins.⁵²⁷ Almost all Bedouins originate from Saudi Arabia and used to live by animal pastoralism; most were Saudi subjects before they opted to become Kuwaiti citizens. Some moved to Kuwait during the 1950s, but larger numbers migrated during the 1960s and 70s. Their immigration was neither individual nor spontaneous, but collective and encouraged by the Kuwaiti government for a number of reasons. First, the government needed an increase in its population demographic in order to strengthen Kuwait's viability in the

⁵²⁵ Longva (2006).

⁵²⁶ Ghabra (1997).

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

face of Iraq's annexation threats. "Six days after Kuwait declared its independence on 19 June 1961, Iraqi troops stood at its border and threatened to invade the new state on the grounds that Kuwait used to belong to the province of Basra during the Ottoman period ..."⁵²⁸ Second, the government needed them for manual labour, fearing that the large numbers of workers from other Arab and foreign countries would overwhelm the economy and alter the 'Kuwaiti heritage'. "Conventional wisdom has it that 'Kuwaiti traditions' and the 'Kuwaiti way of life' are under threat and that expatriates are the major source of this menace."⁵²⁹ The government was mostly concerned about the 'Arab political threat', as Arab expatriates who work in Kuwait share the same language and a majority adhere to the same religion, Islam. As such, they have a unique opportunity to spread their ideas among a wide Kuwaiti audience:

*The Arab impact on Kuwaiti nationals at the intellectual, cultural and political level is extensive...Arabs who come to work in Kuwait bring with them their political opinions and ideologies, which has always worried the Kuwaiti authorities.*⁵³⁰

Accordingly, the government believed that the traditional Bedouins would be more loyal to the regime than the more radical and urban-oriented Arab expatriates (such as the Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians).⁵³¹ The Bedouin culture of tribal traditions and values promotes conservative social and political practices, and "purports a blind obedience

⁵²⁸ Longva (2006).

⁵²⁹ Longva (2005).

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Ghabra (1997).

toward the power holders, first and foremost, the ruling family”.⁵³² Hence, the government sought “to make use of tribal symbolism to elicit loyalty and devotion to the nation-state and the state’s leadership”.⁵³³ The third reason that prompted the Kuwaiti government to encourage the immigration of Bedouins was the aim to build a pro-Al-Sabah support base to counter the merchant opposition and ensure the family’s longevity after the introduction of limited parliamentary politics under the 1962 constitutional rule. The Bedouins were culturally the most homogenous group within the Kuwaiti population and were the most easily manipulated and susceptible to government incentives (more on the role of the Bedouins in the Kuwaiti political system below).⁵³⁴

Among the naturalised Kuwaitis who received second-category citizenship are Sunni Arabs from Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, a small percentage of Christian Arabs from Southern Iraq and Palestine, and Shi’a families who originate mostly from Iran, but also from Southern Iraq and Eastern Saudi Arabia. Some of the naturalised Kuwaitis are also part of the Hadhar community because as traders, labourers, seamen, teachers and doctors, they had all contributed to the economy and development of the town before 1961 (Kuwait’s independence).⁵³⁵ These various social groups overlap, as they may be of a certain religious sect while also being part of the urban community. Such an example exists within the Shi’a community in Kuwait, an urban group that migrated to Kuwait before and after the 1920s from the Arabian Peninsula and from

⁵³² Longva (2006).

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

Iran.⁵³⁶ Unlike the Bedouins, they are not part of a homogenous group, as they immigrated to Kuwait from different areas in the Persian Gulf region. They thus consist of four sub-groups who migrated to Kuwait due to poverty, drought, and famine: descendants of the original inhabitants of Bahrain; immigrants from the eastern province of Saudi Arabia (al-Hassa); Arab Shi'a who migrated to Persia from Arabia and back; and the largest group, the Persian Shi'a, who migrated from Iran.⁵³⁷ There is no official government census to clarify the numbers from each group (the Kuwaiti census does not give specific information based on these distinctions).

The presence of the Shi'a community in Kuwait is perceived as legitimate; with the majority arriving and settling in the area around the same time as their Sunni counterparts in the early 18th century, they too contributed to building the nation. The early (pre-oil) arrivals became part of the Hadhar community, and thus received first-category citizenship. After Kuwait's independence in 1961, several of the Shi'a families in Kuwait succeeded in the trade and finance sectors, and played significant roles within the private sector. The Shi'a currently consist of between 25% and 30% of Kuwait's population, and represent a significant proportion of the elite merchant class.⁵³⁸ They have also attained a level of equality within the social and political fabric of Kuwaiti society, and the government has relied on their pro-government votes several times in parliamentary elections down the years. They hold high government positions and regularly make up a considerable proportion of Kuwait's National Assembly.

⁵³⁶ Ghabra (1997).

⁵³⁷ Crystal (1990), 40.

⁵³⁸ Stephenson, L. (2011). The Political Underpinnings of Kuwaiti Sectarian Polemics. *Jadaliyya*.

Overall, the 1959 Nationality Law has been amended seven times in the thirty years since its enactment, each time for the purpose of further restricting access to citizenship. For example, in 1960 an amendment applied a limit of fifty to the number of naturalisations allowed each year; while in 1981, an amendment restricted the granting of citizenship to Muslim candidates.⁵³⁹ Such restrictions on citizenship contributed to the emergence of a stateless category of persons, the Bidoon, who are recognised as permanent residents but hold no documents other than a *laissez-passer* permitting them to leave and re-enter the country.⁵⁴⁰ There are thus a group of people living in Kuwait that are neither Kuwaiti citizens nor citizens of another state. Most of the Bidoon came from nomadic tribes that settled in Kuwait's urban centres and were welcomed by the government as allies during the 1960s; some were naturalised and given full political rights in order to increase the number of pro-government voters. However, the Kuwaiti government speculates that many in the Bidoon community had escaped oppressive conditions in neighbouring countries (Iraq and Saudi Arabia). It claims that these individuals slipped through the Kuwaiti border, destroying evidence of non-Kuwaiti citizenship and pretending to be Bedouins in order to receive Kuwaiti citizenship.⁵⁴¹ Reasons for such actions have mainly to do with the Kuwaiti welfare system, where the state grants free housing, free healthcare and free education to its citizens, as well as a

⁵³⁹ Longva (2005).

⁵⁴⁰ Tetreault and Al-Mughni (1995).

⁵⁴¹ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

host of other economic advantages such as heavily subsidised basic food items, water, electricity and petrol.⁵⁴²

Some Bidoon were offered citizenship during the early 1960s; however, due to illiteracy and/or suspicions of the government's motives, many did not bother to go through the application process.⁵⁴³ Other reasons include lack of proper documentation and unmet demands for full political rights under second-category citizenship status⁵⁴⁴ offered by the government.⁵⁴⁵ Over time, the Bidoon community expanded with further generations being born in Kuwait, yet they were neither naturalised as citizens, nor were they asked to leave. Bidoon claims to Kuwaiti citizenship became a highly complicated and contentious matter – the Kuwaiti government has been approached by several international human rights organisations over the years and pressured into finding a solution.⁵⁴⁶ Encouraged by the Arab Spring in 2011, the Bidoon were the first group in Kuwait to take to the streets demanding their right to equal citizenship.⁵⁴⁷

Overall, due to developments in education, the media, employment, financial opportunity and immigration policies, Kuwaiti society has continued to transform over the years. The country's rapid economic and social transformation, beginning in the 1950s, caused tensions to develop between the state and the various social groups within Kuwaiti society, where opposition groups multiplied and ideological movements emerged

⁵⁴² Longva (2006).

⁵⁴³ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

⁵⁴⁴ 'Second category status' citizens were not allowed to vote, run as candidates, or reach high government posts.

⁵⁴⁵ Longva (2006).

⁵⁴⁶ *Human Rights Watch*. (1995). The Bedoons of Kuwait.

⁵⁴⁷ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

(the Islamic movement, for example, gained momentum in the 1980s). The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 were also major events that shook the country's social, economic, and political foundations. Furthermore, during the 1990s, members from the Bedouin community began moving from the fringes of the country into the urban areas of Kuwait. Bringing with them their values, particularly their conservative orientation, they began to further transform various facets of Kuwaiti society. All these elements contributed to the strains on the relationship between state and society in Kuwait.⁵⁴⁸ In order to better understand this relationship, it is important to examine the origins of the Kuwaiti political system, with a focus on the Kuwaiti Constitution, its National Assembly, and the overall fundamentals of the electoral system in Kuwait.

IV. The Kuwaiti Constitution, the National Assembly and the Electoral System

On June 19, 1961 Kuwait gained its independence from Great Britain. The newly independent state would have an elected legislature, a constitution, and full separation of powers.⁵⁴⁹ Several months later, in December 1961, the reigning Emir, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, called for the election of a Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution and to act as a temporary parliament for the country.⁵⁵⁰ The change in the regime structure from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional system was decided by

⁵⁴⁸ Ghabra (1997).

⁵⁴⁹ Al-Najjar, G. (2000). The challenges facing Kuwaiti democracy. *Middle East Journal*, 54(2).

⁵⁵⁰ Salih (1991).

the ruler and is attributed to two main factors.⁵⁵¹ First, Iraq's claim of sovereignty over Kuwaiti territory led to the urgency "to provide an image of national unity and popular participation in the face of foreign aggression".⁵⁵² Promulgating a new political system that centred on a legislative assembly with limited supervisory powers was a way to fend off foreign aggression, as well as enable the ruler to seek a neutral foreign policy free from superpower entanglements. Second, the growing pressure of an emerging middle class demanding political participation prompted the introduction of a semi-parliamentary system. The ruler needed an internal political mechanism to placate potential opponents while strengthening his relationship with various groups across Kuwaiti society. So, the regime aimed at introducing 'partial liberalisation' where lawmaking authority still resided with the ruler and his appointed cabinet, political parties were prohibited, and voting rights were limited to male citizens.⁵⁵³ Such controlled participation gave those who demanded political participation a sense of proximity to power, while ultimately safeguarded the ruler's authority.

Immediately after independence, Sheikh Abdullah al-Salim issued a decree establishing a Council of Seniors consisting of several of Al-Sabah family members and prominent members of the merchant community, to draft electoral laws and to make preparations for an elected constituent council. The election took place on December 30, 1961; it produced twenty candidates to represent ten electoral districts (two candidates per district). The vote was by secret ballot and was open to all Kuwaiti male citizens over

⁵⁵¹ Amin (1984), 196.

⁵⁵² Yom (2011), 229.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

the age of twenty-one. There were an additional eleven members appointed to the council, all of them from the Al-Sabah family, which raised the number of the council to thirty-one.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁴ Baaklini (1982).

Table 3: Elected Members of the Constituent Council (1962)⁵⁵⁵

#	Name	Social Group
1	Abbas Munawir	Badu
2	Ali al 'adhina	Badu
3	Yusuf al Mutari	Badu
4	Abdullah Fahd al Shamari	Badu
5	Muhammad al Sudairan	Badu
6	Nayif al Dabbus	Badu
7	Khalifa al Jari	Badu
8	Abd al Aziz al Saqar	Merchant
9	Humud al zaid al khalid	Merchant
10	Ya'qub al Humaidi	Merchant
11	Abd allatif al Ghanim	Merchant
12	Ahmad al Fawzan	Merchant
13	Sa'ud al Abd al Razzaq	Merchant
14	Muhammad al Nisf	Merchant
15	Mubarak al Hasawi	Merchant
16	Mansur al Mazidi	Shi'ite
17	Muhammad Ma'raff	Shi'ite
18	Ahmad al Khatib	Hadhar
19	Abd al Razzaq Aman	Hadhar
20	Sulaiman al Hadda	Hadhar

The table above shows the name and social group of each elected member, reflecting various groups within Kuwaiti society. The Bedouin (*badu*) accounted for 35% of the elected members, the Shi'a accounted for 10%, and the merchant community accounted for 40%, while other urban members accounted for 15%. The task of the Constituent

⁵⁵⁵ Alhajeri, A. (2004). Citizenship And Political Participation In The State Of Kuwait The Case Of The National Assembly (1963–1996). University of Durham.

Council was to draft the country's permanent constitution. While the appointed members participated in the deliberations, only elected members could vote.⁵⁵⁶ The Council submitted a constitutional document declaring the system of government and legislative power of the country.⁵⁵⁷

The Kuwaiti Constitution was formally adopted on November 11, 1962, providing for a hereditary monarchy based on popular sovereignty and certain restrictions on the power of the ruler.⁵⁵⁸ The Constitution consisted of 183 articles and was the first such document in the Gulf region. It is a powerful resource that allows citizens to demand political participation, as Article 6 declares, "the system of government shall be democratic, under which sovereignty resides in the people, the source of all powers."⁵⁵⁹ The Kuwaiti Constitution allows the people to exercise their power through a legislative branch, the National Assembly.⁵⁶⁰

*The Constitution stipulates that the system of Government is based on the principle of the separation of powers and that no power may relinquish all or part of its constitutional competence (Article 15). Legislative power is vested in the Emir and the National Assembly, while the executive power lies with the Emir, the cabinet, and the ministers. The Courts exercise judicial power.*⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁶ Baaklini (1982).

⁵⁵⁷ Assiri (2007).

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ The Constitution of the State of Kuwait.

⁵⁶⁰ Tetreault (2011).

⁵⁶¹ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008).

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According to the Kuwaiti Constitution, the ruler recognises the citizens' right to advise, criticise and even question the government's policies. This is a significant step towards citizens' participation in parliamentary politics. On the other hand, the constitution was presented to the Kuwaiti people as an initiative by the grace of the ruler: "The al-Sabah family was neither barred from nor limited in exercising total monopoly of all instruments of political and economic power and its symbols."⁵⁶² Therefore, "the Kuwaiti Constitution allowed citizens only to criticise the ruler's methods of using the power he was holding, or the policies by which he did so. It was not intended to reshuffle the basic division of power by taking away power from the ruling family and the government and handing it to the citizens."⁵⁶³ In practice, the Kuwaiti rulers have made it clear that there were limits to criticising and questioning government policies; the constitution has provided the ruler with the prerogative to dissolve the National Assembly should it become too troublesome.

The Kuwaiti Constitution is regarded as a contract between the ruler and the people, who are represented by the National Assembly. As stated in the constitution, legislative power is vested in the Emir and the National Assembly. The National Assembly is a single chamber to be composed of fifty members elected directly by eligible citizens⁵⁶⁴ through secret ballot, as well as up to fifteen ministers appointed by the Emir, making it a

⁵⁶² Kostiner, J. (2009). Liberalization and its Limits in the Gulf States. In Teitelbaum, J. *Political liberalization in the Persian Gulf*. Essay. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Eligibility to vote was limited to Kuwaiti males of 21 or over who were not in the police or armed forces and had not been convicted of a felony or offence. It was also limited to first category citizens. Since 2005, eligibility has been extended to Kuwaiti women, with the same requirements.

unicameral parliament of up to 65 members.⁵⁶⁵ Ministers are automatically part of the National Assembly; however, their number should not exceed one-third of the number of parliament members. The Emir exercises his powers through his ministers. He appoints and dismisses the prime minister, who also chairs the Cabinet of Ministers. The Cabinet of Ministers are also appointed and dismissed by the Emir upon the recommendation of the prime minister. The constitution stipulates under Article 58 that the prime minister and the Ministers are collectively responsible to the Emir for general state policy. Moreover, every minister is individually responsible to the Emir and the National Assembly for the affairs of his ministry. Until 2003, the Crown Prince took the post of Prime Minister; however, the most recent two prime ministers have not held the title of Crown Prince.⁵⁶⁶

The Emir is considered as the central figure in Kuwaiti political life; he is the Head of State and head of the ruling family. He is “immune and inviolable” according to Article 54 of the Constitution. Thus, he is beyond any political criticism or accountability. He initiates laws and promulgates them; he may issue decrees that have the force of law, provided that they are not contrary to the constitution or to the budget law. He can also adjourn the National Assembly for a period not exceeding one month and may dissolve the National Assembly and call for new elections within two months. He further appoints and dismisses civil, military, and diplomatic officials. He has the sole power to declare defensive war and martial law by decree; such decrees are to be referred to the National

⁵⁶⁵ Parolin (2006).

⁵⁶⁶ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

Assembly within fifteen days. Martial law may not continue unless a decision to that effect is made by a majority vote in the Assembly. He can conclude treaties by decree but must submit them to the National Assembly for ratification. He may also grant a pardon or commute a sentence; general amnesty can only be granted by law.⁵⁶⁷

The ruling family retains a strong direct involvement in government; for example, the post of prime minister is usually held by members of the Al-Sabah family along with other major posts in the government, such as the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defense, Information, Finance, and Oil.⁵⁶⁸ The constitution does not particularly demand that the ruling family monopolise these posts; however, it carefully allows it. The ruling family is composed of several hundred members, and they do not always hold the same political views. Prominent family members are associated with different political blocs, and rivalry is certainly apparent between the two lines of the Al-Sabah family (the Al-Salim line and the Al-Jabir line). The Cabinet of Ministers, while usually composed of Al-Sabah members, also incorporates members from other social groups, “appointed on the basis of their experience or to help the government secure political support among the disparate parliamentary blocs”.⁵⁶⁹ The main role of the Al-Sabah family members in holding ministerial positions is to retain considerable influence for the Emir and blur any distinction between government and the ruling family. As such, the right of ministers to

⁵⁶⁷ Salem, (2007).

⁵⁶⁸ Assiri, A. & Al-Monoufi, K. (1988). Kuwait’s Political Elite: The Cabinet. *Middle East Journal*, 42(1). 48.

⁵⁶⁹ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008).

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be part of the National Assembly gives the Al-Sabah family a greater share of legislative power.

Table 4: Cabinet Composition by Family Background ⁵⁷⁰

		Al-Sabah family		Asil families (original)		Other families		Total
		#	%	#	%	#	%	
All ministers (1962–1968)		18	24.0	34	45.3	23	30.7	
By cabinet (date of installation)								
17 January	1962	11	78.5	3	21.5	-	-	14
28 January	1963	10	66.7	4	26.7	1	6.6	15
6 December	1964	4	28.6	7	50	3	21.4	14
3 January	1965	4	30.8	5	38.4	4	30.8	13
4 December	1965	4	33.3	4	33.3	4	33.3	12
4 February	1967	4	25	6	37.5	6	37.5	16
2 February	1971	2	15.4	5	38.5	6	46.1	13
9 February	1975	4	26.7	5	33.3	6	40.0	15
6 September	1976	5	27.8	6	33.3	7	38.9	18
16 February	1978	5	27.8	6	33.3	7	38.9	18
4 March	1981	6	37.5	3	18.8	7	43.7	16
3 March	1985	6	37.5	5	31.3	5	31.2	16
13 July	1986	6	28.6	9	42.8	6	28.6	21

As the table above shows, the number of royal family members in the cabinet abruptly declined after the 1964 political crisis,⁵⁷¹ from eleven to nine to five, and at the same time cabinet members from other families increased. Those recruited from outside the royal family were often men of high professional and academic standing and were brought in

⁵⁷⁰ Assiri and Al-Monoufi (1988), 48.

⁵⁷¹ Conflict within the legislature reached a peak in 1964 and rendered difficult the formation of a consensus cabinet. In Baaklini (1982).

for their particular expertise. This enabled the government to involve its brightest younger citizens in governmental affairs.⁵⁷²

The National Assembly has the right to initiate legislation. Laws are passed by the Parliament by an absolute majority of members present; legislation must then be approved and promulgated by the Emir. If the Emir does not sanction the legislation within thirty days, it is considered automatically promulgated. The Emir may ask for reconsideration of a bill, in which case the Parliament must affirm it by a two-thirds majority for it to be passed. Given that up to 23% of the Parliament is appointed by the Emir (the cabinet ministers), it may be difficult to find a majority to overrule a request for reconsideration.⁵⁷³ The inclusion of appointed cabinet ministers to the Parliament is a key method of control by the executive, as they can block any initiative by members opposing the government. Elected officials may also serve in the cabinet, in which case the number of ex-officio members is reduced accordingly.⁵⁷⁴

The National Assembly may overturn any of the Emir's decrees that were made while the assembly was dissolved. It can also veto a law proposed by the government. No law may be promulgated unless the National Assembly has passed it and it has been sanctioned by the Emir. Decrees issued by the Emir are referred to the National Assembly within fifteen days following their issue if the Assembly is in session. If the Assembly does not confirm them, they retrospectively cease to have the force of law. The Assembly does not have the right to put a motion of no confidence in the government;

⁵⁷² Baaklini (1982).

⁵⁷³ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008).
Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

⁵⁷⁴ Salem, (2007).

however, it has the right to question individual ministers and follow up with a motion of no confidence in those individuals. The concept of interpellation is borrowed from the European constitutional tradition, and is termed ‘grilling’ in the English language press of the Gulf region.⁵⁷⁵ While the constitution does not provide for a motion of no confidence in the prime minister, the parliament may decide that ‘it cannot cooperate with the Prime Minister’.⁵⁷⁶ The Parliament can dismiss the prime minister only by a majority vote of the elected members amounting to a vote of no confidence in the government as a whole. If the prime minister loses this vote of confidence, the constitution dictates that the Emir dismiss either the prime minister or the Parliament.⁵⁷⁷ If the prime minister is dismissed, the Emir must appoint a new cabinet of ministers. If the Emir decides to dissolve Parliament instead, the new Parliament must decide whether it still cannot cooperate with the prime minister, and “he shall be considered to have resigned and a new Cabinet shall be formed”.⁵⁷⁸ When faced with this scenario in 2006, the Emir decided to constitutionally dissolve parliament; he went on to do so four more times until 2012.

While the constitution stipulates the separation of powers, the fact that the appointed cabinet ministers are part of the Parliament weakens the democratic nature of parliament. Furthermore, the absence of political parties makes it hard for voters to know what individual candidates stand for, making accountability difficult to ensure. Nonetheless,

⁵⁷⁵ Herb, M. (2009). Kuwait: The Obstacle of Parliamentary Politics. In Teitelbaum, J. *Political liberalization in the Persian Gulf. Essay*. New York: Columbia University Press. 136.

⁵⁷⁶ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

⁵⁷⁷ Herb (2009). Kuwait: The Obstacle of Parliamentary Politics,136.

⁵⁷⁸ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

there are several significant mechanisms of accountability, in particular the interpellation of ministers and no-confidence votes. These methods of challenge allow parliament to challenge the government on policy issues and exercise its constitutional right. However, in recent years the more parliament challenged the government, the harsher the government response appeared, with parliament being dissolved several times in response to the interpellation of the Prime Minister. Ultimately, the struggle between parliament and government comes down to each MP's stake in the success of the government:

*This constitutional set-up has often led to a 'co-habitation' situation, where the majority of parliament tends to be opposed to government policies. A 'destructive' attitude of parliament may result from the fact that no MP necessarily has a stake in the success of the government, in contrast to parliamentary democracies. Instead MPs have an incentive to increase their public profile, e.g., by confronting the government.*⁵⁷⁹

Hence, in the absence of direct accountability of the government through elections, the interpellation of ministers has become “unusually prominent in the executive-legislative relationship”.⁵⁸⁰

The current electoral system provides that Kuwait is divided into five electoral constituencies, where each elects ten deputies to the legislature. In each district, the ten candidates with the highest number of votes win the seats, even though they may receive less than a majority of the votes cast.⁵⁸¹ In July 2006, an electoral reform law was passed

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Salem (2007).

that reduced the number of electoral districts from 25 to 5. From 1963 until 1975, elections were held in 10 election districts, with each electing five deputies. In 1981, the government changed the electoral system, whereby 25 election districts were established, with the top two scoring candidates in each being elected to parliament. This election system is more liable to vote buying, as there are fewer electors per constituency, and consequently localised patronage-based politics in non-election periods.⁵⁸²

Due to the prohibition on political parties, parliamentary candidates must nominate themselves and run formally as independents.⁵⁸³ Article 43 of the Constitution does not specifically prohibit the establishment of political parties, yet it is often asserted by the government that it does.⁵⁸⁴ The constitution states that political parties should be allowed at some point in the development of parliamentary democracy.⁵⁸⁵ In order to legalise parties, a constitutional amendment would be required, which needs a two-thirds majority vote in parliament and the endorsement of the Emir. Nevertheless, Kuwaiti political groups act as de facto parties; some have organisational structures, while others are more loosely based parliamentary groupings of independents. Because each candidate is elected as an individual, it is difficult to determine the parliamentary strength of the various groupings. Further difficulty arises because some parliamentary members have dual identities (e.g. tribal and Islamist). The main political distinctions exist between

⁵⁸² *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

⁵⁸³ Salem (2007).

⁵⁸⁴ Abah, S. (2005). Why Do Gulf States Prohibit Political Parties? *Asharq Al-Awsat*.

⁵⁸⁵ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

Islamists and non-Islamists or secularists, and between pro-government and opposition. Further distinctions lie between urban and tribal, and to an extent between Sunni and Shi'a (more on political groupings in the next chapter).⁵⁸⁶

The constitution also provides for Kuwaiti citizens to enjoy the highest degree of respect for fundamental freedoms of all the Gulf states, in particular freedom of expression, freedom of the media and freedom of assembly. However, human rights are not completely guaranteed: freedom of association is not guaranteed as far as the operation of political parties is concerned, and voting eligibility might also be improved, as a large part of the population is excluded from voting rights.⁵⁸⁷ The most serious issues of human rights are reported in relation to the Bidoon and expatriate population; human rights groups contentiously report violations in relation to migrant workers in Kuwait, including wage exploitation, physical and psychological abuse, forced labour and confiscation of passports.⁵⁸⁸

At the same time, Kuwait has enjoyed greater freedom of expression and the media since a new media law was introduced in 2006. Parliament approved the law by a unanimous vote of the 53 MPs present at the session. The law replaced the 1961 Press and Publications Law. It prohibits the closure of publications without a formal court order and bans the jailing of journalists for all but religious offences, criticism of the Emir and calls for overthrow of the government. The Ministry of Information runs the government

⁵⁸⁶ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

⁵⁸⁷ Persons who work in the police force and army, second category citizens and, until recently (2005), women are excluded from voting in parliamentary elections. Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

press, radio, and television broadcasting station.⁵⁸⁹ The first privately owned Kuwaiti television station was sanctioned in 2004, and more followed (at present, Kuwait has 21 privately owned stations).⁵⁹⁰ Residents have access to satellite broadcasting without government interference. The Worldwide Press Freedom Index ranks Kuwait as 63 out of 169 countries (the index runs from 1 (most press freedom) to 169 (least press freedom)).⁵⁹¹

V. Conclusion

This chapter presented a background on Kuwait's political history, providing the context for the case study. Since independence from Britain in 1961 and access to massive oil wealth, the Kuwaiti leadership has established a unique political system. The Al-Sabahs ratified a liberal constitution that guarantees personal freedoms and participatory politics – while at the same time holding onto an authoritative style of leadership by accessing coalition groups to support their rule. This chapter highlighted the key historical transformations that shaped Kuwaiti politics in the twentieth century. The most crucial was the breakdown of the ruling coalition binding the ruler and the merchant families. On the eve of oil, the merchants were at the height of their political power. Within decades, however, they had almost completely withdrawn from formal politics in exchange for guarantees of prominence in the economic realm. The merchants' withdrawal from Kuwaiti politics was accompanied by the leadership's development of new alliances.

⁵⁸⁹ Salem (2007).

⁵⁹⁰ *Dubai Press Club & Deloitte*. (2012). Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015, Forecasts and Analysis of Traditional and Digital Media in the Arab World.

⁵⁹¹ Worldwide Press Freedom Index.

These included historically weaker non-merchant political groupings – Islamic groups, Sunni and Shi’a, tribal groups, and the progressive opposition.⁵⁹² The most important new ally, however, has been the ruler’s wider family – the leadership began to rely on and consult with family members in matters of governance.

Providing an important foundation for the case study, the first part of the chapter explored the origins of the Kuwaiti political system. It examined the pre-oil relationship between the Al-Sabah rulers and the merchant families – the interdependence and unspoken rules surrounding this relationship shaped the future of participatory politics in Kuwait. It further examined the beginnings of popular demands for political participation during the 1938 Majlis crisis; and briefly touched on the impacts of the British–Kuwaiti relationship on the political system at the cusp of independence. The rise of the oil industry and the establishment of an extensive welfare system enabled the leadership to secure alliances with various social groups during the state-building process. The welfare system further cemented society’s dependence on the state, where the leadership ensured that the oil wealth was distributed among the Kuwaiti population as a way to dilute demands for popular participation in the political system. The chapter went on to explore the effects of the Kuwaiti Nationality Law of 1959 on the country’s demographics, arguing that the institution of citizenship created a dividing line among the population, ultimately ensuring that “each Kuwaiti citizen enjoys a measure of middle-class status and a feeling of empowerment”.⁵⁹³ It led to the creation of a unique national identity, where it might be expected that there was more to gain from accepting the status quo than

⁵⁹² Crystal (1990), 109.

⁵⁹³ Longva (2005).

trying to challenge it. However, that was not to be the case. The welfare system and the status that came with Kuwaiti citizenship may have slowed down mass demands for political participation, but they did not discourage various opposition groups from fighting for a say in government decisions and challenging the monarchy.

The last part of the chapter presented an analysis of the Kuwaiti Constitution and its electoral system, finding it increasingly vital to an understanding of the 2011 Arab Spring in Kuwait. The constitution is regarded as a contract between the ruler and the people, and defines the ground rules for the sharing of power between the parliament and the ruling family.⁵⁹⁴ This contract represents the basis of the demands during the Arab Spring demonstrations in Kuwait.

⁵⁹⁴ Herb (2009). Kuwait: The Obstacle of Parliamentary Politics.

Chapter 3

Kuwaiti Parliamentary Politics

I. Introduction

This chapter first examines three phases of parliamentary politics in Kuwait; the first was from 1962 to 1976; the second from 1980 to 1990; and the third from 1990 to 2002. It provides the history of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, the main events that led to its establishment and the main socio-political groupings that were formed within parliament. It presents the failures and achievements of the first parliaments in Kuwait, as well as how the Kuwaiti government was able to interfere in the process of parliamentary politics. It further presents the challenges the parliament faced from various external security threats, such as the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This research portrays the struggle throughout these phases between the legislature and the executive, where the Kuwaiti parliament repeatedly used its constitutional rights to criticise state policies, while the ruling family managed to manipulate parliament by balancing different tribal and sectarian groups against each other.

As the previous chapter has shown, the Kuwaiti constitution allows for parliamentarians to question or interpellate cabinet ministers, subjecting them to a vote of no confidence. However, during the first phases of parliamentary politics in Kuwait, interpellation was a rare procedure, especially if directed at ruling family members. According to Kuwaiti political analyst, Ghanem Al-Najjar, there were six cabinet

members questioned by MPs between 1962 and 1976; only one was from the ruling family. Between 1981 and 1992, eight cabinet members faced interpellation. The most striking change occurred during the period 2006 to 2011, when a total of 27 cabinet members had to face parliamentary interpellation, 21 of whom were members of the ruling family.⁵⁹⁵ This transition stemmed from the development of grass-roots mobilisation and cross-coalitional government opposition, both of which played a crucial role in empowering parliament throughout decades of Kuwaiti parliamentary politics. The chapter thus analyses the advancement of parliamentary politics in Kuwait, and details the main political groupings that dominated the political scene after the Gulf War in 1991. It concludes with Kuwait's political challenges from 2003 until 2009, highlighting three key events: the separation of the post of the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister in 2003; the succession crisis after the death of Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah; and finally, the emergence of a popular movement that successfully pressured the government to alter the electoral system in 2006.

II. Kuwaiti Parliamentary Politics (1962–2002)

Since Kuwait's independence from Britain and its becoming an oil-wealthy state in the 1960s, the Kuwaiti leadership has ruled through popular rentierism atop a coalition of social groups that furnishes enduring loyalty from below while consolidating authoritarian power from above.⁵⁹⁶ The Al-Sabahs have exploited their massive oil revenues to reorganise state institutions, serving the material and symbolic interests of

⁵⁹⁵ Dazi-heni, F. (2015). The Arab Spring Impact on Kuwaiti "Exceptionalism." *Arabian Humanities*.

⁵⁹⁶ Yom (2011), 218.

large constituent classes in return for support. They have also maintained an elected parliament with limited powers and granted significant civil liberties, thereby allowing citizens to express their political concerns and monitor state policies. The result is a rule that embraces popular rentiersm – that is, institutional arrangements that limit government autonomy and render its policies more accountable to popular groups. The reasons for which the Al-Sabahs have chosen to rule through ‘popular’ rentiersm rather than a ‘despotic’ rentierism can be found in the legacies of pre-oil social conflict. When a weak ruler is threatened by social and political opposition without access to extensive wealth, it has a strong incentive to bargain with those political dissenters in order to survive. This can be seen in Kuwait in the historical relationship between the ruler and the merchant class. During the late 1930s, the Al-Sabah dynasty nearly lost power due to the urban merchants’ demands for more political influence (culminating in the 1938 Majlis crisis, discussed in the previous chapter). The leadership was also experiencing geopolitical obstacles, as Britain’s imperial mandate limited its economic resources and military ambitions. Hence, the leadership was forced to compromise rather than coerce, giving concessions to its merchant rivals and securing new urban allies across society in order to guarantee its survival.⁵⁹⁷

The pre-oil relationship between the leadership and coalitional alliances shaped the Al-Sabah’s future use of oil resources to preserve a wide social base. In the 1960s, the leadership could have used its oil wealth and newfound independence to enforce a strategy of repression and exclusion by preventing organised groups from dominating the new political economy. Instead, the leadership sacrificed considerable resources to ensure

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

than each constituent class – the merchants, urban labour, the tribal community and the Shi’a minority – received economic and political side payments that maximised their prosperity. Due to the leadership’s commitment to protecting its interests, these social groups had little incentive to rebel. Conversely, there were powerful constraints that diminished the possibility of the leadership abandoning these commitments.

*Given its past experiences and available resources, Al-Sabah rulers perceived the maintenance of coalitional obligations as the most optimal strategy to foreclose radical dissent and guarantee future survival. In addition, Al-Sabah leaders were hesitant to overturn the inclusionary precedents set by their familial predecessors, and faced the additional obstacle of hostile public opinion should they reverse the course.*⁵⁹⁸

Ruling through popular rentierism proved most beneficial to the Al-Sabah leadership during times of crisis; specifically during the 1982 financial crisis of Suq Al-Manakh and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The leadership was able to draw upon the diverse coalitions it had been nurturing since the 1960s, shuffling out one unpopular group and incorporating new supporters. The Kuwaiti leadership further utilised tactics of control in the form of concessions offered to opposition groups in return for demobilisation. The Al-Sabah ruling family has assembled a broad base of support by “anchoring its power with social forces through implicit pacts that trade power for loyalty”.⁵⁹⁹ The diversity of social groups within Kuwaiti society plays a crucial role in the ability of the leadership to maintain and stabilise its mass support because of a fundamental reality: each group

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, 219.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 220.

prefers Al-Sabah rule over all the alternatives. The Al Sabah leadership has thus relied on the diversity of Kuwaiti society and its partial liberal policies to maintain its regime.

Ultimately, the Kuwaiti leadership resembles a benign form of authoritarianism, where it engages within a somewhat liberalised political system that provides citizens with a legislature that limits its autonomy and a constitution that ensures their liberties. The Kuwaiti political system, although showing the potential onset of democratic inclinations, is still regressive in terms of true political liberalisation. The Emir is at the centre of the political system, not subject to electoral contestation, and can suspend parliament at any time. As the following sections will demonstrate, throughout decades of parliamentary politics in Kuwait, the leadership has not ceased to manipulate the political system and continues to apply a strategy of control.

a. The First Phase of Parliamentary Politics (1962–1976)

On November 12, 1962, the Electoral Law was promulgated and the right to vote and run in parliamentary elections was given to Kuwaiti males over the age of 21, thus excluding women, naturalised citizens and non-citizens. Military and police personnel were also denied the right to vote. The law basically limits the electorate, where the restrictions on the right to vote has elicited a very small percentage of eligible voters in comparison to the total population of the country. Such limitations give the government the upper hand by curbing the influence of citizens within parliamentary politics. The government further controls the process by drawing and redrawing electoral constituencies, which has been an issue of contention between the government and the opposition since the promulgation of the law in 1962. The districts were divided in such a way as to give strength to pro-

government groups and to match the geographic distribution of the socio-political groupings.⁶⁰⁰ They were divided into ten districts, where each district corresponds to a particular social group (see table below). The Electoral Law of 1962 was later amended in 1980 to further the interests of the royal family following the shift in loyalties of various social groups (this will be discussed later in the chapter). Nevertheless, the law led to the first parliamentary elections in the Gulf region, and the emergence of the first phase of parliamentary politics in Kuwait.

⁶⁰⁰ Alhajeri (2004).

Table 5: Kuwait's old voting districts (based on the 1962 Electoral Law) and social groups ⁶⁰¹

	District	Social Group
1	Sharq	Shi'a
2	Qiblah	Sunni merchants
3	al Shuwaykh	Tribes of Shamar, Daffier, 'Ajman and Aniza
4	al Shamiyah	Tribes of Mutair and Rashaidah
5	Kayfan	Mixed merchants and Utaybah tribe
6	al Qadisiyah	Sunnis and a minority of Shia
7	al Dasma	Shia and Sunni evenly divided
8	Hawalli	Sunni majority
9	al Salmiyah	Awazem tribe and a Shia minority
10	al Ahmadi	Tribes of Ajman, Awazem and Fudul

The first phase of parliamentary politics saw the establishment of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, a representation system incorporating several strands of Kuwaiti society.⁶⁰²

The National Assembly is a single chamber composed of 50 members elected directly by eligible citizens through secret ballot, as well as up to 15 Emir-appointed ministers (who make up the Cabinet of Ministers), making it a unicameral parliament of up to 65

⁶⁰¹ Alhajeri (2004).

⁶⁰² Karam, J. (1993). Kuwaiti National Assembly – 1992: A Study in Electoral Geography. *GeoJournal*.

members, who serve a four-year term.⁶⁰³ This unusual constitutional provision allows all Cabinet members seats in the Assembly along with the right to vote on most issues. The insertion of the appointed members of the Cabinet thus allows the government to enjoy a reliable loyal bloc of up to 15 additional voting members of the Assembly, most of whom belong to the ruling family.⁶⁰⁴ The election for the first National Assembly was held on January 23, 1963.⁶⁰⁵ The new Assembly faced its first crisis in 1964 when conflict within the legislature rendered difficult the formation of a consensus cabinet.⁶⁰⁶ Some of the Assembly members had “challenged the cabinet on the grounds that its composition violated the constitutional provision against conflict of interests”.⁶⁰⁷ By way of response, the prime minister requested the reigning Emir, Sheikh Abdulla, to dissolve the Assembly. Sheikh Abdulla refused and ordered the prime minister to form a new government (consisting of the Cabinet of Ministers). Sheikh Abdulla is widely respected in Kuwait and considered to be the father of the constitution. He had strongly supported the promulgation of the constitution and the concept of parliamentary democracy, and had thus kept in check those members of the ruling family that were opposed to the concept.⁶⁰⁸ “The crisis was contained by the Emir’s move to give concessions to the opposition By yielding to the pressure of the opposition, the Emir was making it

⁶⁰³ Parolin (2006).

⁶⁰⁴ Herb, M. (2002). Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(4), 41–47.

⁶⁰⁵ Assiri (2007).

⁶⁰⁶ Baaklini (1982).

⁶⁰⁷ Salih (1991).

⁶⁰⁸ Al-Najjar (2000).

possible for the Assembly eventually to share control with him over the cabinet.”⁶⁰⁹

However, Sheikh Abdulla’s death in November 1965 unleashed the power-grabbing inclinations of several family members. Because many of the Al-Sabah family members hold cabinet positions, the Al-Sabah ruling elite has had ample representation in the legislature. From then on, the government would interfere in parliamentary politics,⁶¹⁰ whether it was through election rigging, changing the electoral boundaries, increasing the number of constituencies or dissolving parliament.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Salih (1991).

⁶¹⁰ Al-Najjar (2000).

⁶¹¹ There are two methods of dissolving parliament: constitutional and unconstitutional. The Constitution allows the executive to dissolve Parliament with the requirement that new elections are to be held within a legally required period (two months).⁶¹¹ An unconstitutional dissolution of Parliament is when Parliament is dissolved without a call for new elections.

Table 6: The Kuwait National Assembly: completion of its legislative terms⁶¹²

No.	Legislative Year	Four-year Term
1	1963	Completed
2	1967	Completed
3	1971	Completed
4	1975	Unconstitutionally dissolved (1976)
5	1981	Completed
6	1985	Unconstitutionally dissolved (1986)
7	1992	Completed
8	1996	Constitutionally dissolved (1999)
9	1999	Completed
10	2003	Dissolved
11	2006	Dissolved
12	2008	Dissolved
13	2009	Dissolved
14	2012	Nullified

⁶¹² Al-Najjar (2000); Herb (2009), 136; and Tetreault, M. (2013). Scheduling Elections in Kuwait. *Middle East Institute*.

The 1963 Assembly went on to complete its four-year term, whereas the following Assembly in 1967 was chosen through election rigging.⁶¹³ The third Assembly that was elected in 1971 also completed its term; however, the fourth was dissolved unconstitutionally in its second year in 1976 (more details on the dissolutions later). Due to this pattern of dissolutions, it is clear that the Kuwaiti National Assembly has not enjoyed much autonomy and rarely initiated policy. However, permanent parties of the electoral body emerged and gradually the parliament became the sole institution in power representing the people as a whole:⁶¹⁴

*It [the National Assembly] did discharge its function of criticising and exposing the government more effectively. Furthermore, it endowed the major political and social forces in the country-the Bedouins, the urban merchants and businessmen, and the nationalists, intellectuals and professionals-with institutionalized means of expressions.*⁶¹⁵

By law, the Kuwaiti government prohibits political parties; however, parliamentary politics has been able to thrive in Kuwait. “Blocs of like-minded candidates have long cooperated in Kuwaiti elections ...”⁶¹⁶ and such electoral and parliamentary blocs act as de facto parties. Various political and social forces have dominated the National Assembly over the years; these groups are formed on the basis of tribal, ideological, and ethnic backgrounds. From its establishment in 1963 until 1986, the Assembly consisted of three major forces: the prominent merchant families, the Bedouins, and the middle

⁶¹³ Al-Najjar (2000).

⁶¹⁴ Karam (1993).

⁶¹⁵ Salih (1991).

⁶¹⁶ Herb (2009). Kuwait: The Obstacle of Parliamentary Politics, 136.

class. The merchants were not demanding major reforms, as they were economically in an advantageous position. The Bedouins were often manipulated by the government to act as a “counterweight to the radicalism of the professionals and the nationalist intellectuals”.⁶¹⁷ It was mostly the middle class and the nationalist intellectuals who directed the more acute criticism at the political and social order, often playing the role of opposition within the parliament.

Table 7: The Composition of Kuwait’s National Assemblies 1963–1985⁶¹⁸

Legislative Terms	Bedouins	Merchants	Middle Class	Total
1963	19	16	15	50
1967	20	17	13	50
1971	20	13	17	50
1975	21	6	23	50
1981	27	8	15	50
1985	27	2	21	50

As the sedentarisation process coincided with the state-building and modernisation processes of the state, the Bedouins were granted Kuwaiti citizenship and geographically clustered into bounded neighbourhoods, thus enabling their integration into the political

⁶¹⁷ Salih (1991).

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

system. “In order to change the electoral balance of power to the disadvantage of the urban commercial elite, the Kuwaiti government gave, in the 1960s and 1970s, a percentage of newly naturalised *Bedouins* the right to vote.”⁶¹⁹ Their integration represented “a dominant conservative force—one that could mollify any dissent from liberal voices like the merchants”.⁶²⁰ Through electoral gerrymandering,⁶²¹ the monarch was able to install his Bedouin constituents into the National Assembly. The monarch had accomplished this goal by establishing ten districts for which citizens each elected five members, limiting the number of votes and thus making it easier to manipulate elections by buying votes and outbidding strong candidates that were disliked by the regime.⁶²² As a result, tribal representatives became the largest single bloc in parliament, and for a period of time the most reliable mouthpiece for the monarchs. Evidently, voting results for parliamentary elections within the Bedouin constituencies from the 1960s to the 1980s consistently showed support for pro-government candidates compared with the more mixed results in the Hadhar constituencies.⁶²³ Out of the 300 seats represented by the six National Assemblies spanning 1963–1985, the tribal deputies held 136 seats (around 45.3%) compared with the merchants who held 23 seats and the Arab nationalists

⁶¹⁹ Ghabra (1997).

⁶²⁰ Yom (2011), 225.

⁶²¹ Gerrymandering is defined as “those practices that explicitly intended to improve the outcomes of individual applicants or groups of applicants to the detriment of other individuals and groups. Gerrymandering can serve a variety of purposes, such as enhancing demographic diversity, rewarding political allies, or giving hiring preference to specific individuals.” In McDaniel, M.A. (2009). Gerrymandering in personnel selection: A review of practice. *Human Resource Management Review*, 19(3), pp.263-270.

⁶²² Tetreault, M. (2013). Scheduling Elections in Kuwait. *Middle East Institute*.

⁶²³ Longva (2006).

and liberals, with 71. Moreover, public service employment was available to all citizens and the tribesmen were especially attracted to military and police posts, which received large budgets throughout the state-building process.⁶²⁴ The Bedouins thus became the backbone of the army, police, and security forces.⁶²⁵ The combined groups of Bedouins (those who began settling from the 1940s onwards and those who were brought in by the state from Saudi Arabia, beginning in the late 1960s, for political purposes) are currently estimated to constitute around 60% of the population.⁶²⁶

The middle class comprised different strands represented by the politicised nationalists, the religious activists, and the politically uncommitted. The politicised nationalists were those who were strongly committed to promoting Arab unity and were against colonialism in the region. They were represented by two groups: the Democratic Bloc led by a prominent physician, Ahmed Al Khatib, and the National Bloc led by a member of a prominent family, Jassem Al-Qutami. The second strand, the religious activists, mainly comprised Muslim fundamentalist groups known as Jam'iyat Al Islah and Jam'iyat Al-Salafiyyin. These two groups seek to spread their conservative Islamic doctrine throughout the Muslim world. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti professionals, who are categorised as the most educated, represent the politically uncommitted. They do not usually adhere to any particular political ideology and they tend to take an independent stance on most political and social issues.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Yom (2011), 225.

⁶²⁵ Salih (1991).

⁶²⁶ Al-Nakib (2014).

⁶²⁷ Salih (1991).

As the monarchy promoted tribal dominance within the National Assembly, it created a new division of labour by privileging them over the same merchant elites to whom they ceded the non-oil economy in order to retain state power.⁶²⁸ The monarch had in a way balanced two dominant political and social forces – the Bedouins and the merchants – with two other urban social forces – the Sunni labour and the Shi’a minority. The Sunni labour represented the urban Sunni males who were given government jobs – clerks, managers, and technicians in various state agencies. However, economic dependence on the state did not guarantee their loyalty in legislative initiatives; some urban Sunnis were moderate and would openly criticise the state when its policies failed. So, the monarch countered the unpredictability of the Sunni urban members by reaching out to the Shi’a minority. The Kuwaiti Shi’a had also benefited from the developmental stage of state-building and had entered public employment. A few prominent Shi’a families enjoyed a close relationship with the monarch, and exploited government contracts rivalling the Sunni merchant elite. After independence, the monarch had reassured the Shi’a of their protection from Sunni predominance by pledging official state representation: the original electoral districts drawn in 1962 had deliberately encompassed Shi’a neighbourhoods, and the Kuwaiti Shi’a had participated in parliamentary politics. The regime had furthermore assigned at least one post to a Shi’a minister in most cabinets through the years, symbolising official state representation of the Shi’a community.⁶²⁹

The main issues that dominated debate within the Assembly throughout the first decade of its existence (1963–1975) concerned oil policy.

⁶²⁸ This explains the decline of the merchants’ representation within the Parliament since 1975.

⁶²⁹ Yom (2011), 225.

*The debates over oil policy were exemplified in the scrutiny of the following issues: the principle of royalty expensing, the utilization of natural gas, the participation agreement, [and] the nationalization of oil... The opposition members won credit for leading constructive debates over these issues which later culminated in the state undertaking the necessary measures aimed at preserving and safeguarding this strategic commodity.*⁶³⁰

Thus, in its first decade of its existence the Assembly performed its legislative functions, looking after the material interests and wellbeing of constituents by confronting the government in its plans and oil policies. In fact, the view is common to all opposition deputies, in particular the secular liberals, that the government must be watched closely, not least because of its tendency to appropriate oil resources which rightfully belong to the Kuwaiti people.⁶³¹ However, despite the Assembly's "superb record as illustrated by the debates over the oil policy, [it] tended, in the majority of cases, to abuse its authority of controlling the executive branch. This was apparent in the much too frequent use of such parliamentary devices as the interrogation of ministers and the passing of no-confidence motions".⁶³²

The first two dissolutions of the Assemblies were promulgated by royal decree; the first in August 1976, and a decade later in July 1986 (see chart 3.3 above). There are several reasons given for the unconstitutional dissolution of parliament in 1976. First, the Assembly failed to decide on a number of legislative proposals, leading to slow and

⁶³⁰ Salih (1991).

⁶³¹ Longva (2005).

⁶³² Salih (1991).

complicated parliamentary procedures. This resulted in the failure of hundreds of parliamentary bills, the majority of which were concerned with crucial details surrounding the livelihood of the individual citizen. Second, the Assembly wasted most of its time in unnecessary debate and often made unfounded allegations against ministers. Third, there was a lack of cooperation between the Assembly and the Cabinet of Ministers. Finally, the critical conditions in the region which threatened the Gulf monarchies dictated swift action by the Kuwaiti leadership to preserve the state's security. Some members of the Assembly had become increasingly linked to opposition groups outside the state, leading to inter-Arab politics playing an important role. "Students regularly protested not only in solidarity with Palestinians (the largest expatriate group in Kuwait), but also with regional opposition groups in Bahrain, Oman, and elsewhere in the Gulf."⁶³³ As Kuwait was experiencing its first phase of parliamentary politics and acquired a relatively free press, the government feared "that the uncontrolled or rather misguided freedom of expression in the National Assembly would cause more fragmentation in the society and could ultimately lead to total political anarchy and collapse."⁶³⁴

Even though the royal family allowed the establishment of a legislative assembly and accepted the representation of various social groups within the Assembly, it continued to place its own authority above parliamentary politics.⁶³⁵ The legislative debates demonstrated that parliamentary politics had unleashed forces that were considered a

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Baaklini (1982).

threat to the hegemony of the ruling family. The legislature had attempted to control, criticise, and oversee the work and expenditures of the ruling family and the bureaucracy; more, it criticised the executive's decisions in foreign policy. The Kuwaiti ruling elite were particularly sensitive to internal events that affected their relations with other states.⁶³⁶ An interesting initiative taken by the legislature before the 1976 dissolution was its censuring of Saudi intervention in the domestic affairs of Kuwait. A small group within the Assembly had suggested that the government needed to set certain requirements for the granting of citizenship to alien Arab residents. Such suggestions were considered inappropriate from the perspective of the royal family, and they began to fear that such opposition would create instability. Another conflict was over the role of the judiciary. The Assembly sought to pass a law granting the Supreme Council of the courts the right to review the constitutional status of any government administrative order. The Emir vetoed the law, but parliament attempted to obtain a vote during the parliamentary session by simple majority. Fearing an undesirable precedent, the government dissolved the Assembly.⁶³⁷ "Thus the dissolution of the legislature in Kuwait can be viewed as an indication of the importance it assumed and the serious threat it posed to the authority of the royal family."⁶³⁸

Another reason for the failure of the legislature that led to dissolution in 1976 was the structural weaknesses of the opposition. "The banning of formal political parties led to the growth of loosely knit opposition groups based on friendship networks. These groups

⁶³⁶ Crystal (1990), 92.

⁶³⁷ Ghabra, S. (1991). Voluntary Associations in Kuwait: The Foundation of a New System? *Middle East Journal*, 45(2), 199–215.

⁶³⁸ Baaklini (1982).

were powerful in mobilising protests and adopting rejection positions, but to retain their adherents they tended to outbid each other with extreme positions.”⁶³⁹ For example, the opposition within the Assembly “lost merchant support when it tackled stock market regulation, finance, planning, price controls and state corruption.”⁶⁴⁰ Thus, given that legislative politics requires collective action in order to make demands on the government, the disparate groups within the Assembly were incapable of mobilising effectively. This led to the polarisation of politics and the eventual dissolution of the legislative assembly.

This research regards the first parliamentary phase of the Kuwaiti National Assembly as an effective period of legislative functioning due to its criticising and exposing of the government and the ruling family. Furthermore, between 1963 and 1976 parliament enacted 584 laws.⁶⁴¹ It succeeded during that time to extend its authority over many areas of public policy and was adamant on using all the authority to which it was entitled under the constitution. The legislative experience unleashed oppositional forces through the election process, further creating a lively debate that was widely reported by the Kuwaiti press (thus extending participatory politics to the public). Lastly, its influence on policies had presented the ruling family with a serious threat. “The choices were clear – either the royal family would have to accept a reduced role and become more like the constitutional monarchies of Western Europe, or it had to clamp down on this budding and growing

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Crystal (1990), 92.

⁶⁴¹ Salih (1991).

power of the legislature.”⁶⁴² Ultimately, the ruling family opted to dissolve the legislature and suspend the constitution with the encouragement of neighbouring countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. The country thus continued without a parliament for four years, until the government changed the electoral boundaries to increase the number of constituencies, and held a new election for the fifth parliament in 1981.⁶⁴³

b. The Second Phase of Parliamentary Politics: 1980–1990

The second phase of parliamentary politics in Kuwait coincided with the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The Kuwaiti ruling elite were wary of the revolution, fearing its influence on Kuwaiti politics. The revolution entered Kuwaiti politics through the Kuwaiti Shi’a, Iranian residents and several Sunni religious activists, who all supported the overthrow of Shah’s regime. The restoration of the National Assembly in 1980 was a crucial strategy by the government to contain the importation of regional ideologies. By restoring the National Assembly, the government provided a platform for dissidents to discuss domestic policies, as an attempt to shift the focus away from foreign policies. “It was a political risk. A more open system would make Kuwait still more permeable to foreign influences. The Assembly was an attempt to strike a deal with the public – to tolerate internal dissent in exchange for excluding discussion of foreign issues.”⁶⁴⁴

In September 1980 precautionary measures to ensure the formation of a pro-government Assembly were taken by the government in preparation for the election of

⁶⁴² Baaklini (1982).

⁶⁴³ Al-Najjar (2000).

⁶⁴⁴ Crystal (1990), 102.

the new Assembly. The first was the amendment of the 1962 Electoral Law, which originally divided Kuwait into ten constituencies with five deputies representing each. The amendment divided Kuwait into 25 constituencies, with two deputies representing each. The strategy of increasing the number of constituencies was designed to benefit the government by enabling it to exert its influence on fewer electors per constituency, thus making vote-buying more viable.⁶⁴⁵ The government sought to justify the change by claiming that the demographic structure of the country had changed dramatically due to the “opening of new residential areas as well as the shrinking of other areas”.⁶⁴⁶ In past elections, the government had sought domestic allies in order to counter the merchant opposition. With the government’s support, including redistricting, the Shi’a had won ten seats in the 1975 Assembly. However, in the 1981 elections, the government sought to reduce Shi’a representation in the Assembly to four candidates, mainly due to fear of their connection with revolutionary Iran.⁶⁴⁷

The new (fifth) National Assembly was convened on March 9th, 1981. The elections produced an Assembly that included a majority of tribal leaders, a few Sunni Islamists and fewer Shi’a members. The 1981 Assembly successfully completed its four-year term; one of its main tasks was to debate the constitutional amendment previously proposed by the government in its royal decree. “One group of members interpreted the proposal of amending the constitution as a step towards restricting democracy and

⁶⁴⁵ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report.

⁶⁴⁶ Salih (1991).

⁶⁴⁷ Crystal (1990), 101.

denying the Assembly its legislative and supervisory powers.”⁶⁴⁸ On this basis, they declined to debate the issue. However, another group supported the proposal, claiming that the critical conditions faced by Kuwait at the time necessitated constitutional change. The vote on the motion resulted in the majority supporting the proposal, enabling the Assembly to open the debate on constitutional amendments. The debate was heated among Assembly members and the opposition was able to encourage the Kuwaiti press to wage a popular campaign against the constitutional amendments. Finally, the ruler accepted the demands of the majority of the Assembly and the constitutional amendment proposal was withdrawn.⁶⁴⁹

Other debates that dominated the Assembly included the crash of the unofficial stock market, the Suq Al-Manakh, an over-the-counter exchange where the securities of 45 companies registered in Gulf countries outside Kuwait were traded. It was established a few months after the official Kuwait stock exchange was founded in 1977.⁶⁵⁰ As the rise of oil prices in the late 1970s had generated an unprecedented amount of wealth in the Gulf states, “nouveau rich Kuwaitis turned to stocks as an investment vehicle to park their wealth”.⁶⁵¹ The official stock market handled only a small number of government bonds and shares in companies registered in Kuwait; therefore, the Suq Al-Manakh had emerged due to the scarcity of companies in which to invest. “The nature of the trading in the official market and the old family domination through large blocs of privately traded

⁶⁴⁸ Salih (1991).

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Hijazi, I. (1982). Kuwait In Bailout Effort After Market Collapses. *The New York Times*.

⁶⁵¹ Colombo, J. (2006). Kuwait’s Souk al-Manakh Stock Bubble. *The Bubble Bubble*.

shares also encouraged Suq Al-Manakh.”⁶⁵² The Suq appealed to the small investor, since its minimum was less than half that of the official market. The government did not officially sanction the Suq, but neither did it close it.

In 1982, the crash of the Suq Al-Manakh led hundreds of speculators into default, with unsecured debt causing the market to inflate and pop.⁶⁵³ The government was slow to develop a policy to react to the crisis. The Cabinet of Ministers was split between the those who wanted to bail the investors out and others who called for criminal proceedings.⁶⁵⁴ Despite the decline of oil revenues, the government prepared a bailout plan and gave support to thousands of investors who lost heavily in the collapse. The state continued to cover the liabilities and by the mid-1980s the land acquisition programme had ended and civil service hiring had almost halted.⁶⁵⁵ The Suq Al-Manakh crisis gave the government an opportunity to re-establish its links with the older merchants. This group played a crucial role in resolving the crisis by supporting the government in negotiating settlements within the Chamber of Commerce.⁶⁵⁶ “At the end of 1986, the government announced that it would resume high levels of expenditure on land purchases, earmarking an additional \$340 million a year in an effort to stimulate the economy.”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵² Crystal (1990), 98.

⁶⁵³ Colombo, J. (2006).

⁶⁵⁴ Crystal (1990), 98.

⁶⁵⁵ Yom (2011), 225.

⁶⁵⁶ The older merchants had also benefitted from the crisis, profiting the most due to the transfer of wealth that occurred. In Crystal (1990), 100.

⁶⁵⁷ Crystal (1990), 98.

The Suq Al-Manakh crisis was increasingly overshadowed by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iran–Iraq War in 1980. The Iranian Revolution had an inevitable impact on Kuwaiti domestic politics. Ayatollah Khomeini declared that it was his nation’s policy to encourage Islamic uprisings “with the directive of replacing the Western-oriented regimes of the Gulf with Iranian-oriented, preferably Shia, theocracies”.⁶⁵⁸ Iran’s policies impelled Kuwait into joining the coalition of Arab states supporting Iraq in its war with Iran. In 1983, “a series of six car bomb attacks occurred at the US and French embassies, the airport, a residential area, two ministries and the industrial area ...”⁶⁵⁹ The attacks were linked to a Tehran-based Iraqi Shi’a opposition group with the name of the ‘Islamic Da’wa Party’.⁶⁶⁰ Another incident included a failed assassination attempt on the reigning Kuwaiti Emir, Sheikh Jaber, by foreign pro-Iranian militants in May 1985. “The regime interpreted these attacks as evidence that Iran was manipulating foreign organisations and Kuwaiti Shia citizens to punish Kuwait for supporting Iraq in the Iran–Iraq War.”⁶⁶¹

These incidents prompted the Kuwaiti government to reassess its relationship with the Kuwaiti Shi’a community. It is important to note that the security issues emanating from the Iranian revolution and the war only became truly domestic issues as a result of previous political decisions made by the Kuwaiti ruling elite.⁶⁶² During Kuwait’s first phase of parliamentary politics, the government had relied on the Shi’a to balance the

⁶⁵⁸ Hatem & Gildea (2011).

⁶⁵⁹ Crystal (1990), 103.

⁶⁶⁰ Shanahan, R. (2004). The Islamic Da’wa Party: Past development and future prospects. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 8(2).

⁶⁶¹ Hatem & Gildea (2011).

⁶⁶² Crystal (1990), 101.

Sunni opposition and merchants, who would openly criticise the states when its policies failed.⁶⁶³ By developing an alliance with the Shi'a, the leadership had inadvertently politicised them. This was not the first politicisation of the Shi'a community; Shi'as had joined the Majlis Movement in 1938 with full force and were outspoken about concerns at their disenfranchisement from the electorate that voted for government department committees in the early 1950s. "But when Shias demonstrated in 1938 and at other times, they were under the control of established Shia leaders, large merchant families like al-Kazimi, Marifi, Behbehani, [and] Qabazard."⁶⁶⁴ During the 1960s and 70s, the government felt secure enough in its control to encourage sectarianism as a counterbalance to the radicalism of the merchant class. When the Iranian Revolution erupted in 1979, the government failed to anticipate the mass appeal of revolutionary Iran and the domestic consequence of encouraging sectarianism. Once the dangers of the revolution became apparent, the government overreacted.⁶⁶⁵ There was no evidence that the Shi'a community as a whole was less than loyal to the regime; however, the Kuwaiti government began to perceive them as an extension of the external threat of the Iranian Revolution.⁶⁶⁶ It began to distance the Shi'a community from the state and "shuffle the margins of its coalition".⁶⁶⁷ In 1981, the government raised the number of electoral districts from 10 to 25 as a way to dilute Shi'a voting enclaves, dropping their Assembly

⁶⁶³ Yom (2011), 225.

⁶⁶⁴ Crystal (1990), 101.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Crystal, J. (2005). Public Order and Authority: Policing Kuwait. In Dresch, P. and Piscatori, J., *Monarchies and Nations: Globalization and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*. New York: I.B. Tauris.

⁶⁶⁷ Yom (2011), 225.

participation from ten seats in 1975 to four seats in 1985 (see above). An unofficial policy of discrimination against Shi'as in key state positions was in effect, where high ranking Shi'as were eased out of key military and police posts. "Shias complained of tight security surveillance in Shi'a neighbourhoods, of tightening quotas at Kuwait University, of vanishing job opportunities in both the public and private sectors, and of growing restrictions on communal and religious life."⁶⁶⁸ However, the Kuwaiti government did not intend to permanently disenfranchise the Shi'a: "even during this period, it kept close ties with Shi'a families and parliamentary deputies ... it [only] sought to ride out the Iran–Iraq war by playing off Sunni fears, gambling that it could win back Shi'a trust through royal entreaties and political compensation afterwards."⁶⁶⁹

While the Shi'a coalition within the Assembly was being quietened, a new political bloc was beginning to emerge: Sunni Islamist groups who were popular in the tribal areas and the lower income communities. As a consequence of electoral redistricting in 1981, the Sunni Islamists manifested into a new force in parliament by securing five seats in 1985. They allied themselves with the conservative tribal parliamentarians and endorsed the regime's policies. In return, the regime accommodated their positions on social issues such as advancing religious education and supporting Islamic financial regulations.⁶⁷⁰ However, the 1985 Assembly also included a large bloc of liberals, resulting in one of the most combative assemblies the regime had ever faced. The stock market crash and regional security threats had generated heated debates within the Assembly that

⁶⁶⁸ Crystal (1990), 106.

⁶⁶⁹ A personal interview with a Shi'a merchant businessman in March 2007 by Yom, S. (2011), 225.

⁶⁷⁰ Ghabra (1991).

ultimately led to the forced resignation of an Al-Sabah member from a ministerial post. The resignation was a political first and had the Emir believing that the Assembly had overstepped its boundaries; thus, in July 1986, he suspended parliament indefinitely,⁶⁷¹ citing security concerns, excessive division and the need for unity in the face of the Iran–Iraq War.⁶⁷²

The truth was that the dissolution of the 1986 Assembly was prompted by repeated collisions between the government and the parliament over cases of corruption by various ministers. Immediately after its election in February 1985, the Assembly confronted the government over the alleged improper use of government funds by the justice minister during the Suq Al-Manakh crisis. The minister was a member of the royal family, and was accused of procuring personal financial gain during the crisis; evidence was gathered and the opposition within the Assembly organised a motion of no confidence in the minister. Due to the widespread support for the motion, the minister submitted his resignation in advance, and the Emir promptly accepted it. The confrontation between parliament and government continued even after the minister's resignation, the Assembly focusing on the financial sector. The Assembly invoked its right to appoint a special investigation committee to examine internal documents at the Central Bank; the committee submitted a report with investigative details of a KD150 million loan granted by the Commercial Bank to the Industrial Bank of Kuwait. Sensing an encroachment on its executive authority, the government rejected the report and passed the issue to the Constitutional Court. The State Audit Bureau's alleged mismanagement of the country's

⁶⁷¹ Tetreault, M. (2000). *Stories of democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁶⁷² Crystal (1990), 82.

reserves caused a heated reaction within the Assembly. The Assembly, citing misappropriation of funds, reprimanded both the finance minister and the oil minister. Other ministers were exposed to severe criticism by the Assembly, which prompted the government to submit its resignation on July 1, 1986 citing “the impossibility of cooperation between the cabinet and the Assembly.”⁶⁷³

Most of the factional groups in Kuwait welcomed the dissolution of the Assembly in 1986. The merchant community accepted the government’s decision to dissolve the Assembly, as the confrontation between the legislature and the government had been a main obstacle to a thriving economy. The middle class welcomed the dissolution as a way out of the deadlock within parliament, which was blamed on overambitious deputies. The Islamic bloc was compensated with the removal of the education minister, who was the focus of their complaints over the years due to his anti-Islamic reforms. This left the progressive group (liberals) as the only group opposed to the dissolution; they believed that the experience of the previous 25 years (since independence) had proven that Kuwait was capable of handling democratic elections and procedures. As the country was facing severe security threats due to the spillover of the Iran–Iraq war, the dissolution of the Assembly was accepted by Kuwaiti society because most believed that the Kuwaiti parliamentarians had abused their authority in order to control the executive and bring down a government minister.⁶⁷⁴ The competing behaviour of the deputies had raised alarms as to the need for national unity at times of crisis, leading the regime to view the parliament as a liability and to completely dissolve a democratic institution in the name

⁶⁷³ Salih (1991).

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

of national security. After the dissolution of the Assembly in 1986, the government took further security measures: for the first time since independence, a government-appointed censor was assigned to every newspaper and publication. “The government justified its actions by citing the increasingly violent pressures emanating from the Iraq–Iran war, the parliamentary crisis, and the developing militancy expressed by sections of the Shi’a community.”⁶⁷⁵ The government went further, limiting public meetings.

It was not until 1988 that a coalition was formed demanding the return of constitutional life and condemning the restrictive security measures taken by the government.⁶⁷⁶ The Constitutional Movement or, as many would call it, the ‘Diwaniyah Movement’, included the merchant elites, the liberals, and a few Sunni Islamists and tribal leaders. The movement was mainly led by secularist liberal Sunnis.⁶⁷⁷ Their demands were simple and non-confrontational as regards the regime: they reaffirmed the legitimacy of Al-Sabah rule and aimed for the restoration of parliament and civic freedoms.⁶⁷⁸ The movement organised huge rallies and former Assembly members began to sponsor *diwaniyahs*, weekly meetings in private homes or privately owned halls – they are considered the quintessential institution of Kuwait civil society.⁶⁷⁹ As the movement still largely supported the Al-Sabah regime, the government’s initial reaction was restrained. However, as the opposition went on to demand their rights the regime turned to the Kuwait State Security police, which responded with force, using stun grenades and

⁶⁷⁵ Ghabra (1991).

⁶⁷⁶ Yom (2011), 225.

⁶⁷⁷ Crystal (2005). Public Order and Authority: Policing Kuwait.

⁶⁷⁸ Yom (2011), 225.

⁶⁷⁹ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

tear gas. Ultimately, the government announced the unprecedented closure of the *diwaniyahs*. Since the movement mainly consisted of the Sunni merchant elites, the government's use of force against them in 1988 was quite unsettling for the Sunni ruling family. The liberal Sunnis had always been a loyal opposition to the regime; however, their participation in the Diwaniyah Movement represented a direct challenge to its authority. Nevertheless, the government did not have the political will to respond to their insubordination with the same level of force that it willingly used against the Shi'a, and in February 1990 the regime opened private negotiations with the opposition coalition in hopes of a compromise. In April of that year, the Emir extended an offer: a new National Council that was to be partly elected and partly appointed. The opposition largely rejected the offer; however, before the regime could respond, external forces had intervened.⁶⁸⁰

c. The Third Phase of Parliamentary Politics (1990–2002)

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The crisis ended with the liberation of Kuwait and the defeat of Iraq in February 1991. The Iraqi invasion and the events that followed brought an important turning point in the political development of Kuwait.⁶⁸¹ In October 1990, at the height of these events and before the liberation, a conference was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. While in exile, the reigning Emir, Sheikh Jaber, met with the opposition forces and agreed to demands for greater democratisation, provided they stood

⁶⁸⁰ Crystal (2005). Public Order and Authority: Policing Kuwait.

⁶⁸¹ Salameh, M. and Kanoush, M. (2011). Kuwait's Democratic Experiment: Roots, Reality, Characteristics, Challenges, and the Prospects for the Future. *Department of Political Science*. Yarmouk University & Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan.

by him during his exile.⁶⁸² The conference in Jeddah was a rare opportunity for the Kuwaiti people to reject the Al-Sabah regime and call for revolutionary democratic alternatives. Instead, Kuwaiti social groups demanded the restoration of their monarchy,⁶⁸³ and in return, they expected a commitment by the Emir to constitutionalism and the return of parliamentary politics. This agreement was more like a renewal of the old political contract between the ruler and the ruled.⁶⁸⁴ Acknowledging the importance of political stability to the preservation of his regime, Sheikh Jaber responded by honouring his assurances on restoring civic freedoms and holding parliamentary elections after the liberation; elections were scheduled for October 1992.

After years of limited political activity, the election campaign for the 1992 Assembly was lively.⁶⁸⁵ To ensure that the Al-Sabah ruling family kept its promises, Kuwaiti intellectuals invited U.S. politicians to advise them on campaign techniques and public lobbying. They also called for international observers to monitor the polls.⁶⁸⁶ The majority of the elected parliamentarians were from the opposition, and independent candidates. Opposition factions united within the Assembly, where they had the opportunity to participate in forming the government. During its term, the Assembly

⁶⁸² Yetiv, S. (2002). Kuwait's Democratic Experiment in Its Broader International Context. *Middle East Journal*, 56(2), 257–271.

⁶⁸³ Yom (2011), 225.

⁶⁸⁴ Salameh and Kanoush (2011), 67.

⁶⁸⁵ Kapiszewski, A. (2006). Elections and Parliamentary Activity in the GCC States: Broadening Political Participation in the Gulf Monarchies. In Khalaf, A. & Luciani, G. *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf* (Publication). Dubai: Gulf Research Center. 99.

⁶⁸⁶ Kechichian, J.A. (1993). *Political dynamics and security in the Arabian Peninsula through the 1990s*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

initiated a series of investigations, including inquiries into the events leading to the Iraqi invasion, government responsibility for the Kuwaiti defeat, alleged corruption and mismanagement in the Kuwait Investment Office (which manages the country's overseas capital), and the cost-effectiveness of arms deals with Western powers. The Assembly thus opened the door to criticism on the government's policies and its role in the Iraqi invasion. The investigations touched on sensitive issues and required confrontations with top government officials, including members of the ruling family. "It was the first time in the history of the GCC countries that such people were publically questioned, strongly criticised and forced to take responsibility for their actions."⁶⁸⁷ Kuwaiti opposition groups accused the leadership of misuse of power, corruption and an array of flawed foreign policy decisions that led to the occupation of their country.

During the Iraqi occupation, almost all Kuwaiti groups (Bedouins, Shi'a, naturalised citizens, etc.) supported the Kuwaiti monarchy and rejected the imposed provisional government that was set up by the occupying Iraqi forces in Kuwait. The national unity of the Kuwaiti population during the Iraqi invasion was thus a key motivator for both the government and the opposition to find a peaceful solution to their political impasse. "Invasion and occupation created a sense of solidarity and eroded social cleavages"⁶⁸⁸ to the point where the government began to adapt to demands by the younger generation of naturalised citizens for political equality (the right to participate in parliamentary politics, i.e., voting and candidacy). In 1994, the Assembly passed a political rights law that stated that every male born to a Kuwaiti father, whether that person was naturalised or not, was

⁶⁸⁷ Salameh and Kanoush (2011), 99.

⁶⁸⁸ Ghabra (1997).

a Kuwaiti by origin, thus granting him the right to vote and to run for office.⁶⁸⁹

Participatory politics was therefore extended to a certain percentage of the population, and social divisions were somewhat minimised. Nevertheless, the ruling elite continued to interfere in parliamentary elections, mostly by shifting coalition alliances and vote-buying.

The 1996 Assembly was not as confrontational as the previous one.⁶⁹⁰ The opposition had dropped seven seats from their 1992 level, leaving them with 14 seats. Meanwhile, there was an increase in seats held by the pro-government, or “service” candidates, those seeking to work with the government in return for patronage in the form of services for their constituents.⁶⁹¹ The government had encouraged this trend by promoting tribal primaries (preliminary elections to determine which candidate will represent the tribe in the parliamentary election), thereby increasing the political weight of the tribes in the electorate. This arrangement between the government and the tribes has led to a sharp increase in the number of tribal parliamentarians over the years, and consequently, a loyal pro-government support group within the Assembly.⁶⁹² However, tensions between the government and Islamist groups in the Assembly arose when the Ministry of Information permitted books critical of Islam to be displayed at the international book fair in Kuwait.⁶⁹³ On May 3, 1999, the Emir constitutionally dissolved parliament due to the

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Kapiszewski (2006), 100.

⁶⁹¹ Smith, K. (1999). Divided Government in Kuwait: The Politics of Parliament since the Gulf War. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 8(1), 1–18. 7.

⁶⁹² Smith (1999), 7.

⁶⁹³ Kapiszewski (2006), 100.

Islamists' attempts to grill the interior minister, Sheikh Saud Nasser Al-Sabah, for allowing the publication of material that was considered contrary to Kuwaiti and Islamic cultural values.⁶⁹⁴ The Emir viewed this interpellation as a violation of his powers, especially coming from the Islamists who had an unwritten agreement with the leadership never to attack members of the ruling family. The Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Sheikh Sa'ad al Abdullah Al-Sabah, warned the Islamists that criticising the ruling family jeopardised the security of the country, and that this security would always be prioritised "over and above democracy".⁶⁹⁵ In an attempt to defuse the crisis, then, the Emir dissolved parliament and called for new elections to be held in July 1999.

The election campaign for the 1999 Assembly was again characterised by intense activity on the part of various political groups (more details on the different groups later). "During traditional political meetings in diwanis, candidates openly charged the government with conspiracy, interference in the elections, incompetence, [and] corruption."⁶⁹⁶ Demands for greater political participation and reform were central, including women's political rights and the (suspended) right to hold tribal primaries, whose results had significantly impacted previous parliamentary elections. The resulting Assembly had fewer pro-government members, and there were gains for Islamists, who undertook a number of actions to widen the role of the Islamic law within society – for

⁶⁹⁴ Ehteshami (2013).

⁶⁹⁵ Kapiszewski (2006), 100.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

example, they managed to force the government to reintroduce gender segregation at Kuwait University.⁶⁹⁷

Tensions between parliament and the government developed again in 2002 when Assembly members grilled the finance minister on the matter of misappropriation of public funds. Recurring crises between parliament and the government followed between 1999 and 2009, which typically ended in the dissolution of parliament or the dismissal of government (see chart 3.4 above for a list of Assemblies that completed their terms). Overall, while the previous decade of the 1980s had demonstrated the regime's ability to modify and adjust its coalition preferences in response to various crises, the post-Gulf War 1990s revealed how the coalition groups themselves were also able to shift allegiance in line with their own interests.⁶⁹⁸ After liberation, tensions between the government and opposition groups were mainly due to structural shifts within the social classes. The government was attempting to rebuild its coalitions in order to maintain its authority in the context of parliamentary politics and secure its legitimacy in the running of the country. The regime began by rekindling its relationship with the old merchant elites in order to better coordinate economic policy, providing them with more institutionalised access to policymaking in exchange for technocratic expertise. This created a schism between the government and the younger merchant class, who became more sympathetic to the traditional liberal opposition. The Kuwaiti liberals, in the meantime, gained ground within parliament and spearheaded new reform demands, such as female suffrage and electoral redistricting. Despite the government's attempts to win

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Yom (2011), 225.

back the support of the Shi'a coalition, the Kuwaiti Shi'a tended to align with the liberal opposition due to harboured resentment for their treatment during the 1980s.⁶⁹⁹ The Sunni labour class had also deviated from the monarchy, the promise of government wages no longer being sufficient to dictate their political loyalties. The Islamists within the Assembly also proved to be less than reliable allies of the ruling elite and would join other opposition forces in challenging state policies and instigating corruption charges.⁷⁰⁰ Finally, the tribal community became less dependable due to generational turnover, where some of the younger tribesmen had not inherited their elders' aversion to progressive urban politics.⁷⁰¹ These shifts in coalitions and the emergence of new blocs continued to dominate Kuwaiti politics and contribute to the ongoing struggle between parliament and government in the decade following, ending with the Arab Spring in 2011. Overall, recent decades of parliamentary politics demonstrate that even though Kuwait's political system has an active legislature, the ruling elites have perpetually fought for the upper hand, witness the repeated dissolution of parliament, a crucial weapon by which the government continues to exert its influence in order to preserve its sovereignty.

III. The Advancement of Parliamentary Politics

In examining the past four decades of parliamentary politics, this research outlines the various challenges that face its advancement in Kuwait. These challenges may be divided

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Smith (1999), 7.

⁷⁰¹ Yom (2011), 225.

into two categories: structural and political. The non-partisan nature of parliament and the process of government formation represent structural challenges that restrict the development of an effective parliament. The illegality of political parties in Kuwait creates an imbalance in parliament's functioning as between the government and the elected members. The government (represented by the Cabinet of Ministers) is allowed to speak and be represented as a united bloc, making it the only de facto political party permitted to operate in parliament. Meanwhile, the elected members are not allowed to function collectively, or to mobilise a coalition with its own representative within parliament. Hence, the government enjoys a stronger position in lobbying for votes on key issues. "The government ministers move among the elected members as a unified body; while elected members can speak only as individuals."⁷⁰²

In addition to the Cabinet of Ministers (who make up one-third of the Assembly), around 50% of elected members would not have been elected without the support of the government, making the government capable of winning a majority vote on any legislation being passed. The government's support of candidates takes the form of financial incentives and the facilitation of various types of services for the candidates' electoral constituency. Having a large presence of unelected members in parliament dilutes the democratic process and remains a major structural weakness in Kuwaiti parliamentary politics. The manipulation of the electoral process by the government has led to several elected Assemblies that were favourable to government positions. This

⁷⁰² Al-Najjar (2000).

government interference in the electoral process represents a key challenge to the advancement of parliamentary politics in Kuwait.⁷⁰³

Another structural restraint within Kuwait's parliamentary system is the process of government formation. The government is represented by the Cabinet of Ministers, which is appointed by the prime minister and approved by both the Emir and parliament. If parliament does not approve of the government, the prime minister takes up the matter with the Emir, who then decides whether to ask the prime minister to form a new government, or dissolve parliament and call for a new election. The constitution allows the concept of appointed ministers as de facto members of parliament. Conversely, the government has to include at least one elected member of parliament in order to be a constitutional government. If an elected minister disagrees with the Cabinet on an issue and decides to resign, the government is then rendered unconstitutional. As a precautionary measure, the government has increased the number of elected ministers to two, and sometimes four or five. The issue of how many ministers should be elected parliamentarians is fiercely debated; as the constitution limits the size of the cabinet to 16 ministers, including the prime minister, the government should not constitute more than one-third of the parliament in order not to dominate voting.⁷⁰⁴

Meanwhile, there are three main political challenges that restrict the development of an efficient parliament: a disparity in the balance of power; internal divisions within the opposition; and leadership competition within the ruling family.⁷⁰⁵ The disparity in the

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Diwan, K. (2011). Kuwait's Impatient Youth Movement. *Foreign Policy*.

balance of power is derived from the vast resources that are at the disposal of the government and which give it a dominant position in any balance of power. The Kuwaiti government controls all major economic resources in the country. Since 1975, it has owned 100% of the oil industry, the main source of income for Kuwait.⁷⁰⁶ The massive oil resources are at the direct political and bureaucratic disposal of the government, leading to an increase in government influence within the political system “... to the extent that no other socioeconomic players could challenge it”.⁷⁰⁷ Another major source of power in the hands of the government is land. The government owns 97% of the land in Kuwait, and its distribution, preservation and use are entirely at its discretion. Lastly, the government employs 95% of the labour force, making it the main source of income for most Kuwaiti citizens.

Another challenge to the advancement of parliamentary politics is internal divisions within the opposition in parliament.⁷⁰⁸ The main divisions lie between liberal and Islamic, urban and tribal, and in terms of sectarian tension, between Sunni and Shi’a. These divisions provide the ruling elites with the ability to play off one group against the other, until the end result accedes to their authority. As such, the Arab Spring in 2011 was alarming to the ruling elite because these political and social divisions came together in mass demonstrations calling for political reform. Such unity among the opposition and the population as a whole created panic within the ruling elite and led to the heightening

⁷⁰⁶ In 1975, under pressure from the Parliament, the government nationalized the oil industry, composed of the Kuwait Oil Company (previously shared by Gulf Oil and British Petroleum) , the Kuwait National Petroleum Company, and the Petrochemical Industries Co. In Al-Najjar (2000).

⁷⁰⁷ Al-Najjar (2000).

⁷⁰⁸ Diwan (2011).

of internal security and an increase in cooperation efforts with fellow GCC members (see Chapter 4). Overall, despite an array of government advantages, the Kuwaiti parliament makes repeated challenges, and the threat inherent in its purpose and function has prompted the Emir to use his constitutional rights to dissolve the legislature on numerous occasions. This research subscribes to the idea that the Kuwaiti parliament may not be efficient in passing laws and enacting real political reform, but it nevertheless fulfils the particular function of confronting the government and keeping it in check.

Despite the challenges, it is important to highlight the positive elements of Kuwait's parliamentary politics. For example, differences of opinion within the ruling family have greatly influenced the advancement of parliamentary politics in Kuwait. Political differences among members of the ruling family have proved to be of benefit in terms of a more open society and a more participatory form of governing. In fact, one of the major factors that led to the establishment of the 1938 Legislative Council was the sharp differences between the reigning Emir, Sheikh Ahmad and another member of the family, Sheikh Abdulla, who became the Chairman of the Council and later Emir (in 1950). As noted above, Sheikh Abdulla is known as the father of the constitution, and had strongly supported the concept of parliamentary democracy, keeping in check those members of the ruling family opposed to the concept. Moreover, differences of opinion within the ruling family surfaced during the 1976 Assembly dissolution, where two members of the family withdrew from parliament in order to limit the power of the wider ruling family due to their commitment to the constitution. "Since Kuwait's liberation in 1991, differences over the level of commitment to democracy and the constitution, and over the way the country is being administered, have been clear, with public statements and

resignations from public office used as expressions of such differences.”⁷⁰⁹ A historical difference of opinion was publically aired between members of the ruling family on July 13, 1997, when 17 junior members of the family signed a petition to the Emir demanding political reforms and a clear commitment to the constitution. The leader of the group made the petition public and went further by meeting with various political groups to discuss their concerns. Thus, differences among the ruling family have proved to be helpful in the advancement of parliamentary politics.⁷¹⁰

Another key positive element of parliamentary politics in Kuwait is the emergence of political groupings. While the Kuwaiti constitution does not specifically prohibit the formation of political parties, there is no mechanism for their registration as legal entities. In order to legalise parties, a constitutional amendment would be required, which needs a two-thirds majority vote in parliament and the endorsement of the Emir. However, the constitution does state the political parties should be allowed at some point in the development of parliamentary democracy in Kuwait.⁷¹¹ In the meantime, political groupings do exist, and act as *de facto* parties. In recent years, the main political distinctions have been between Islamists, the liberals/secularists, the tribalists, and the Shi’a. The emergence of these political groupings has played an important role in confronting the government on various issues. They have continued to transform and

⁷⁰⁹ Al-Najjar (2000).

⁷¹⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹¹ Salem (2007).

shift positions over time; however, ultimately, they infuse lively discussion into the political process and help shape and influence government decisions.⁷¹²

a. Political Groupings in Parliament:

- 1) *The Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM)*: The ICM is represented by the Sunni Islamic Brotherhood Movement, one of the strongest political movements in Kuwait. It “has had links with the Muslim Brotherhood and supports a revolutionary pan-Islamic message that calls for an essential reorganization of society’s institutions”.⁷¹³ This group is characterised as being highly organised, and has a hand in the operation of important economic institutions and charities throughout the country. It maintains a presence in the Coalition of Universities, the teachers’ association, trade unions, ministries, the Islamic Zakat centre and the Islah society. It also owns a number of effective media outlets. Through its non-governmental organisation, the Social Reform Society, it issues a monthly periodical that calls for the application of Islam as the sole source of legislation in the state.⁷¹⁴ The secretary-general of the movement is Nasser Al-Sane; its representatives include prominent opposition figures such as Osama Shaheen, Jamaan Herbish, Hamad Al-Matr, Mohammad Dalal and Falah Al-Azami.⁷¹⁵
- 2) *The Popular Islamic Bloc*: This group consists of the religious fundamentalist Sunnis who are otherwise known as Salafis. They have links to the Wahabbis and

⁷¹² Al-Najjar (2000).

⁷¹³ Smith (1999), 7.

⁷¹⁴ Karam (1992), 385.

⁷¹⁵ Zaaier, H. (2012). Kuwait's Opposition: Who Are They? *Al-Monitor*.

pursue a very conservative agenda that focuses on maintaining the traditional power structures of society. Politically, it runs parallel to the ICM, but with a much stricter ideology.⁷¹⁶ Unlike the ICM, its activities are more spontaneous than institutional. Although the political agenda of the ICM and the Salafis differ, they are still able to unite on social issues such as gender segregation and “raising the standards of public morals”.⁷¹⁷ Its first two leaders were Jassim Al-Aoun and Khaled Sultan.⁷¹⁸

- 3) *The National Islamic Alliance (NIA)*: This is the largest political grouping representing the Shi’a community. It is largely composed of Shi’a Islamists; however, it supports both liberal and Islamist candidates.⁷¹⁹ Affiliates include former MPs, Adnan Abdulsamad and Ahmad Lari.⁷²⁰
- 4) *The National Democratic Alliance (NDA)*: The NDA consists mainly of secular liberals. It supports the constitutional arrangements but generally advocates further democratisation. In 2005, it firmly supported granting women full political rights.⁷²¹ Its current leader is Khaled Al-Fadhala, a prominent opposition figure.⁷²²

⁷¹⁶ Karam (1992), 385.

⁷¹⁷ Smith (1999), 7.

⁷¹⁸ Zaaier (2012). Kuwait's Opposition: Who Are They?

⁷¹⁹ Smith (1999), 7.

⁷²⁰ *World Public Library*. (n.d.). National Islamic Alliance (Kuwait).

⁷²¹ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report. 15.

⁷²² Calderwood, J. (2010). Arrests in Kuwait Stir Free-Speech Debate. *The National*.

An affiliate of the alliance is former parliamentarian, Mohammed Jassem Al Saqer.⁷²³

- 5) *Kuwait Democratic Forum (KDF)*: The KDF was formed after the liberation of Kuwait from Iraq in 1991. It consists of a nationalist-leftist stream which comprises former Arab nationalists who represented the traditional opposition movement. It had a strong presence in the 1985 parliament, and has recently joined forces with the NDA.⁷²⁴
- 6) *The Popular Action Bloc (PAB)*: Formed in 2001, this is more of a parliamentary faction than a unified political group. It is a coalition of like-minded MPs pursuing populist economic policies and committed to strong parliamentary oversight of public money and constitutional safeguards. Its members are strongly oppositionist and rally around a populist agenda. It includes nationalists, tribal deputies, Islamists and, on occasions, Shi'a MPs.⁷²⁵ Its two leading figures are prominent opposition figures, Ahmed Al-Saadoun and Mussalam Al-Barrak, both former parliamentarians. In 2006, the PAB threw its support behind the new transgressors of political boundaries in Kuwait: reform-minded youth movements.⁷²⁶ In 2011/2012, the group and its members had a key role in the Arab Spring demonstrations in Kuwait.

⁷²³ Yammine, D. (2012). Kuwait's Elections: Sectarianism, Tribalism and Change. *Al-Monitor*.

⁷²⁴ *Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS)*. (2008). Assessment Of The Electoral Framework: Kuwait. Final Report. 15.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Diwan, K. (2013). The Politics of Transgression in Kuwait. *Foreign Policy*.

- 7) *The Constitutional Bloc*: This bloc represents the country's powerful merchant families. It comprises prominent businessmen who have close ties to the Kuwaiti Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which enjoys great political and economic power in state affairs. Its members have always called for giving way to the people's participation in parliamentary politics.⁷²⁷
- 8) *The Tribalists*: The tribalists represent the outer constituencies of Kuwait. The largely tribal population was brought into Kuwait's political sphere by the ruling family in the 1960s and 1970s as a counterweight to the more politically sophisticated and demanding urban population (see above). They were the last of the Kuwaiti population to benefit from the 1970s oil boom, making them more susceptible to economic incentives from the government.⁷²⁸ They thus make up what was described above as the majority of the "service deputies" within the Assembly; that is, intermediaries in patron-client relationships between the ruler and the people. Once elected, the service deputies provide tangible benefits to their constituents. "The government is happy to oblige because such representatives do not challenge its right to rule as long as benefits continue to flow to their constituents through themselves."⁷²⁹ However, their allegiance to the government is not always solid due to generational variations (mentioned above),

⁷²⁷ Karam (1992), 385.

⁷²⁸ Smith (1999), 7.

⁷²⁹ Tétreault, M.A. (1995). Patterns of culture and democratization in Kuwait. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 30(2), 26–44. 34.

and has continued to fluctuate through the years. These tribal forces include the Al-Mutair, Al-Rashaida, Al-Awazem and Al-Ajman tribes.⁷³⁰

IV. Kuwait's Political Challenges (2003–2010)

Before the advent of the Arab Spring in 2011, Kuwait was experiencing a cycle of parliamentary dissolutions and snap elections due to a struggle between the government and opposition groups. This section aims to present the events that led to this struggle: the separation of the post of the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister in 2003; the succession crisis after the death of Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah; and the emergence of a popular movement that successfully pressured that government into altering the electoral system in 2006. The consequences of these events culminated in the Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011–2012, where various socio-political groupings in Kuwait joined forces to peacefully demonstrate against government corruption. This research highlights these events as being among the political challenges that led Kuwait into political deadlock.

a. Limited Political Reform and the Succession Crisis (2003–2006)

The results in the parliamentary election for the 2003 Assembly were highly influenced by the political situation in the region. The U.S. invasion of Iraq that led to the end of the Saddam regime had removed the “Iraqi threat” on which the Kuwaiti government had relied to secure public support for its pro-government candidates.⁷³¹ The Shi’a expected to

⁷³⁰ Yammine (2012).

⁷³¹ Kapiszewski (2006), 102.

gain more seats due to developments in Iraq, where the Iraqi Shi'a gained power after years of discrimination under Saddam. The liberals also expected to gain; they were pushing for the modernisation of the country that went along with President's Bush initiative to bring democracy to the region.⁷³² However, their expectations proved wrong. The liberals suffered a setback, with the number of independent liberals in parliament going from six to four. Their defeat had to do with U.S. policies in the region, where American democratic initiatives were perceived as hypocritical due to their occupation of Iraq. The Assembly thus saw a majority of Islamist candidates, both Shi'a and Sunni, taking 21 out of the 50 seats. The service candidates represented by the tribalists also gained a good number of seats, leading to an Assembly that was almost equally divided between pro-government lawmakers and an Islamist-dominated opposition.⁷³³

Immediately after the elections of July 2003, the reigning Emir, Sheikh Jaber, decided to separate the posts of Crown Prince and Prime Minister for the first time in Kuwait's political history. The post of Crown Prince had held the position of Prime Minister since the inauguration of the constitution, stipulating the right of the Emir to select his own Crown Prince and Prime Minister. The constitution does not specify that the same person should hold both posts. According to sources, the Emir yielded to pressure by the U.S. government to introduce political reforms after the fall of the Iraqi dictator. "Kuwait's ruling family has been under intense pressure – particularly from the US – to loosen its grip on power."⁷³⁴ Following the Iraqi invasion in 1990, Kuwait had difficulty gathering

⁷³² Carothers, T. (2007). U.S. democracy promotion during and after Bush. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

⁷³³ Kapiszewski (2006), 102.

⁷³⁴ *BBC News*. (2003). Kuwait appoints new PM.

international support for military intervention due to its being perceived as a non-democratic nation, and the Kuwaiti leadership has been conscious of its image within the international community ever since. As former GCC Secretary-General, Abdulla Bishara, explains it: “Kuwait needs to be worth saving and respecting, and becoming more democratic is one way to accomplish this goal.”⁷³⁵ The separation of the posts of Prime Minister and Crown Prince was thus a decision taken by the Emir in an attempt to implement political reform. He considered political reform a matter of national security, and pertinent to the preservation of his regime.

The first to hold the post of Prime Minister as a separate entity to the Crown Prince was the Emir’s brother, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed Al-Sabah (the current Emir). As with the post of Crown Minister, the new post of Prime Minister that was created in 2003 was exclusively assigned to members of the ruling family. Nevertheless, the separation of the two posts was considered a major step towards political reform in Kuwait. The possibility of appointing someone outside the royal family as prime minister is more realistic now that the positions have been separated. Moreover, since the prime minister assumes the role of head of government, the separation of the two posts allows parliament to question the prime minister on potential corruption without implicating the Crown Prince. A leading political consultant, Jassem Al-Saadoun, states: “Separating the posts of prime minister from crown prince is very important. It will enhance the power of parliament. You are at least potentially able to change the prime minister if he fails.”⁷³⁶ Although members of parliament do not have the power to confirm cabinet nominees (the Cabinet

⁷³⁵ Yetiv (2002).

⁷³⁶ *BBC News*. (2003). Kuwait appoints new PM.

of Ministers is appointed by the Emir), they are allowed no confidence votes by simple majority, enabling them to remove individual ministers. This step is usually taken after parliamentary questioning of that minister, referred to in Kuwait as ‘grilling’. The constitution stipulates that this may also be applied to the prime minister, where the Assembly is allowed to remove the prime minister by voting on a motion citing “inability to cooperate with the government”.⁷³⁷ Accordingly, the Emir is authorised to use his constitutional authority to dissolve the Assembly when it threatens to grill government ministers.

Following the decision to separate the two posts, the Emir asked parliament, as a token of respect for him, to grant women the right to vote. “The parliament acknowledged that it respected the Emir, but did not grant his wish.”⁷³⁸ The Emir nevertheless appointed women to cabinet positions, despite the objections of Islamists within the Assembly. In response, the Islamists mounted campaigns against the women, demanding that all female ministers wear the veil. Their demands were ignored by the ruling family, who became the main institutional force behind women’s political rights in Kuwait. The government initially changed its position from indifference to a more positive view of women’s political rights after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, where women had demonstrated their patriotism by joining resistance groups against the Iraqi invaders. External pressures emanating from U.S. policies in the region had also impacted the ruling family’s support for women’s rights. In addition, the government was faced with increasing internal pressures from domestic women’s movements. By 2005, women’s rights had become a

⁷³⁷ Katzman, K. (2016). Kuwait: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy. *CRS Report for Congress*.

⁷³⁸ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012), 282.

dominating topic within parliament and Kuwaiti society, complete with street demonstrations and lively debates in the popular press. The government thus employed the full range of its power by providing material incentives for some members of the Assembly to pass a law allowing political rights for women.

*In addition, a clever parliamentary maneuver forced the body to vote on a new version of the law, which was introduced as an act of emergence, requiring only one vote in the same session for passage. This meant that the opponents of the bill would have no time to offer counter-incentives to vulnerable members or use the normal two weeks' interval to mobilize citizens against it.*⁷³⁹

Political rights for women was achieved on May 16, 2005, around eight months before Sheikh Jaber's death.⁷⁴⁰ Allowing women to vote and run for parliament significantly changed Kuwait's electoral system and parliamentary politics. The number of eligible voters almost doubled in the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for 2007.

Furthermore, the inclusion of women in the electoral base increased pressure on the government to legalise political parties. Lawmakers began to approach the prime minister "to amend Kuwaiti law to explicitly permit the functioning of political parties",⁷⁴¹ emphasising pluralism and the peaceful rotation of power. The speaker of parliament, Jassim Al-Khorafi, called for the legalisation of political parties as part of the process of democratic reform: "Democracy in Kuwait cannot continue without political organisation

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Tetreault, M. (2012). Looking for Revolution in Kuwait. *Middle East Research and Information Project*. 3.

⁷⁴¹ Kapiszewski (2006), 102.

based on parties.”⁷⁴² However, legalising political parties was deemed risky by the government, which believed that the domination of particular groups (such as the Islamists) might backfire and destabilise the country.

In January 2006 the death of the Emir led to a succession crisis. “For many years, both the reigning Emir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sa’ad Al Abdulla Al-Sabah, were too frail to perform the duties of their respective offices – indeed they were almost incapacitated.”⁷⁴³ The Emir’s brother, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, had thus taken over many of the responsibilities of both the Emir and the Crown Prince. Due to heir-designate Sheikh Sa’ad’s incapacitation, his assumption of power was contested both within the ruling family and the Assembly. Within the ruling family, a majority had publicly invited Sheikh Sabah to lead the nation; however, Sheikh Sa’ad insisted that he was fit to rule and wished to take the oath in front of parliament, as required by the constitution. The failure of the ruling family to resolve the succession crisis paved the way for parliament to intervene and play a decisive (and constitutional) role in settling the dispute. The parliament moved to depose the heir-designate and opted for Sheikh Sabah. In order to avoid a direct parliamentary deposition, Sheikh Sa’ad issued a letter of abdication, leading to the appointment of the acting Prime Minister, Sheikh Sabah, as the new Emir on January 29, 2006.⁷⁴⁴

Kuwait’s succession crisis was complicated by a stipulation in the constitution that restricted the right to rule to one branch of the Al-Sabah family: the descendants of

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Khalaf, A. & Luciani, G. (2006). *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*. Dubai: *Gulf Research Center*, 46.

⁷⁴⁴ Salem (2007).

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah. The stipulation was designed to put an end to factional strife within the family; however, in practice, it translated into a complex and informal procedure to regulate the alternating of power between the descendants of Sheikh Mubarak's two sons, Salem and Jaber.⁷⁴⁵ The consequence of the appointment of Sheikh Sabah (who is from the Jaber line) in 2006 was the favouring of one branch of the royal family, which now held all the important posts.⁷⁴⁶ Sheikh Sabah further sidelined the Salem branch of the family when he appointed his brother, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, as the new Crown Prince, and his nephew, Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad, as prime minister, both from the Jaber branch.⁷⁴⁷

The allocation of posts to members of the royal family inevitably created dissatisfaction among the sheikhs, who began to use parliamentary interpellation to attack the government and try to force redistributions of cabinet posts.⁷⁴⁸ "... (Royal) rivals have used members of the National Assembly as proxies, encouraging parliamentary challenges to weaken the other's position within the cabinet."⁷⁴⁹ Interestingly, popular demands for the removal of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser, that culminated in the Arab Spring in 2011, derived from a seed planted by members of the royal family who were excluded from key ruling positions. They belong to the Salem branch, and have the right to become Emir (more details in the next chapter).⁷⁵⁰ Overall, the succession crisis

⁷⁴⁵ Khalaf and Luciani (2006), 46.

⁷⁴⁶ Herb (2002). *Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf*.

⁷⁴⁷ Salem (2007).

⁷⁴⁸ Herb (2002). *Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf*.

⁷⁴⁹ Diwan (2011).

⁷⁵⁰ Alwahaib, M. (2002). *Kuwait: The Crisis and its Future. Arab Reform Brief*.

and its resolution highlighted the role of parliament in the political system, underlined a key fragmentation within the ruling family, and led to the tumultuous events of 2006.

b. The Orange Movement and the Electoral Law (2006)

In the spring of 2006, less than six months after the Emir's accession, there was an important political development: a group of lawyers challenged the constitutionality of a law banning public gatherings that had been uncontested for two decades. The case went to the Constitutional Court, which ruled that the law was unconstitutional.⁷⁵¹ This emboldened a number of Kuwaiti youths to organise an escalating series of public gatherings and demonstrations calling for the amendment of the electoral system to reduce the number of constituencies from 25 to five in order to eliminate vote buying and unfair representation. The Electoral Law was altered in 1992 to increase the constituencies from ten to 25: "opposition leaders alleged that the constituencies were gerrymandered in such a way as to favour allies of the government and were small enough so as to enable the easy buying of votes to decide the outcome."⁷⁵² In this way the government was able to manipulate the results in smaller districts and make it more difficult for politically or ideologically motivated groupings to form.⁷⁵³

In the first demonstration, around 200 men and women wearing orange t-shirts and waving orange flags gathered in front of the Saif Palace, where the Cabinet of Ministers were meeting. "Press coverage and word of mouth ensured that news of the

⁷⁵¹ Salameh and Kanoush (2011), 68.

⁷⁵² Salem (2007).

⁷⁵³ Westall, S. (2012). For Kuwait's next ruler, family peace most urgent priority. *Reuters*.

demonstration would spread, sparking another rally the following week where more than 500 people gathered.⁷⁵⁴ The protestors, who became known as the ‘Orange Movement’, were the first reform-minded youth movement in Kuwait. The Orange movement of 2006 represented a new means of political organisation and activism, as Kuwait’s internet-savvy youth staged public rallies and mobilised popular pressure for the reform of Kuwait’s electoral districts. By 2009, their tactics had diffused into new youth movements, more tribal and Islamist in composition, and led to a new political environment that was further energised by the street politics of the Arab Spring in 2011.⁷⁵⁵

The Orange movement proposed a five-district constituency as a template for expanding direct representation of political minorities. Minorities would have a better chance of being elected in bigger constituencies because each voter would have only four votes, limiting the power of any one political group or trend to gain an entire district.⁷⁵⁶ They quickly garnered the support of members of parliament, where the majority supported the five-district concept because it represented a step towards political reform and would lead to less interference by the government in parliamentary elections.⁷⁵⁷ The government responded to the demonstrations with an offer to compromise, suggesting the restoration of a ten-district constituency, which the National Assembly rejected. A cabinet minister then suggested putting the ten-district plan to the Constitutional Court. This was seen as a delaying tactic, and 29 MPs supporting the five-district plan stood up

⁷⁵⁴ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

⁷⁵⁵ Diwan (2013). The Politics of Transgression in Kuwait..

⁷⁵⁶ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

⁷⁵⁷ Salem (2007).

and left the session without a quorum. The following morning, demonstrators gathered in front of the parliament building to find it surrounded by police and special forces in riot gear. In solidarity with the Orange Movement, several MPs joined the protestors. Another rally took place the following night, at which some MPs pledged to interpellate the prime minister in parliament; questioning a sitting prime minister was unprecedented in Kuwait's political history.⁷⁵⁸

Faced with growing tensions within the Assembly and among the protestors, the Emir exercised his constitutional right to dissolve the Assembly and call for new elections on the basis of the old 25-district electoral system, hoping to realign parliament in his favour.⁷⁵⁹ According to the constitution, once the Emir dissolves parliament, an election should ensue within 60 days. The elections were held on June 29, 2006 – the last to follow the 25-district law. The 2006 elections were also the first in which Kuwaiti women were given full political rights to vote and run for office. Election campaigns by parliamentary candidates centred on the issue of electoral districts and political corruption. Voters had the opportunity to choose between three main camps: the group of MPs who advocated the five-district plan, another in favour of a redistribution formula, and a third group (i.e. government supporters) who argued for keeping the 25 districts and maintaining the status quo.⁷⁶⁰ In the end, government supporters did not win enough seats and a loose opposition alliance supporting the five-district reform won more than two-thirds of the 50 seats in parliament. After the elections, the government capitulated

⁷⁵⁸ Assiri (2007).

⁷⁵⁹ Salem (2007).

⁷⁶⁰ Assiri (2007).

and a reformed electoral law was passed reducing the number of districts to five.⁷⁶¹ The government's yielding to the electoral law changes was a huge victory for the members of the Orange Movement. The youth group that organised the movement gained recognition as a powerful tool in initiating demands for political reform, and key members of the opposition began to realise the potential of engaging Kuwaiti youth in parliamentary politics.⁷⁶²

The impact of the Orange Movement on the government's decision to alter the electoral system in 2006 represents a key transformation in the political history of Kuwait. The collaboration of youth groups and opposition members within the Assembly led to the motivation for a wider range of Kuwaiti citizens to be more involved in Kuwaiti politics. During the election campaigns, various non-profit voting committees emerged with the sole purpose of spreading knowledge among ordinary citizens on the election and voting process.⁷⁶³ The 2006 election recorded one the highest voting turnouts in the history of Kuwaiti parliamentary elections (91.9%),⁷⁶⁴ not only because of the inclusion of women, but also because of the vigorous election campaigns that targeted Kuwaiti youth. The percentage of the total citizen population under 25 is as high as

⁷⁶¹ *Al-Arabiya*. (2012). Kuwait refers controversial electoral law to court.

⁷⁶² After the 2006 election, candidates increasingly began to engage youth in their election campaigns.

⁷⁶³ I was part of such a committee; we were called the 16/5 Committee after the date, May 16th, when women received the right to vote. We had our campaign office in the National Democratic Alliance. We did not favour a particular faction; rather, our goal was to spread information on the voting process. We continuously emphasised our neutrality.

⁷⁶⁴ *Institute For Democracy And Electoral Assistance (IDEA)*. (2011). Voter turnout data for Kuwait (Parliamentary).

37.7%;⁷⁶⁵ thus, the participation of Kuwait's youth in parliamentary politics has a huge impact on election results. Their inclusion meant that opposition forces in the Assembly gained momentum in their efforts to confront the government and demand further reforms of the political system, leading to a cycle of crisis and confrontation between government and parliament.

c. Cycle of Parliamentary Elections and Dissolutions (2008–2010)

On March 17, 2008, sectarian confrontations inside and outside parliament prompted the entire Cabinet of Ministers to resign. Sectarian ill-will exploded in reaction to Shi'a citizens' public mourning for the death of senior Hezbollah figure, Imad Mughnieh.⁷⁶⁶ The Kuwaiti government charged the Shi'a activists, including two former MPs belonging to the parliamentary bloc, the NIA,⁷⁶⁷ with "belonging to a secret Kuwaiti branch of Hezbollah bent on overturning the regime".⁷⁶⁸ Meanwhile, two serving Shi'a MPs were the subject of a parliamentary inquiry. In addition to the upheaval in parliament, inflammatory charges were made in anti-Shi'a television broadcasts by two stations owned by a faction of the ruling family.⁷⁶⁹ Some Kuwaiti newspapers published leaders calling for revocation of citizenship for those who took part in the Mughnieh

⁷⁶⁵ Almunajjed, M. & Sabbagh, K. (2011). Youth in GCC Countries: Meeting the Challenge. *Booz & Company*.

⁷⁶⁶ Tetreault, M. (2013). Scheduling Elections in Kuwait. *Middle East Institute*.

⁷⁶⁷ A Shi'a political grouping which held two seats in parliament.

⁷⁶⁸ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

⁷⁶⁹ *ShiaChat*. (2008). Shiite Crackdown Fuels Sectarian Tensions In Kuwait.

mourning rally, and suggested they “be deported to Iran”.⁷⁷⁰ The arrests, and anti-Shi’a sentiments in the media, triggered two demonstrations by hundreds of Shi’a claiming the existence of a sectarian campaign by security agencies against prominent figures of the Shi’a community.⁷⁷¹ “The issue has snowballed from an action against the Mughnieh rally into a major crackdown on a political grouping known for its bold national positions,” said the chairman of the Kuwait Society for the Advancement of Democracy, Nasser al-Abdali.⁷⁷² In order to reduce sectarian tensions the Emir suspended parliament and called for new elections, which were scheduled for May 2008.

The May 2008 election was the first held under the new system. The results led to an increase in opposition representation to 36 seats in the 50-seat assembly.⁷⁷³ The Sunni Islamists emerged as the main winners, doubling their presence to become the single largest bloc in parliament. Despite making up more than half the electorate, women failed to enter the 2008 parliament. The Shi’a increased their presence by one seat to five, while the liberals and their allies almost maintained the strength they enjoyed in the previous parliament.⁷⁷⁴ In November 2008, members of the Assembly spearheaded by the Islamists attempted to question the Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser Mohammed al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, on the issues of mismanagement of the country’s affairs, undocumented expenditure by the Prime Minister’s Court and the demolition of illegally constructed

⁷⁷⁰ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

⁷⁷¹ *Lebanonwire*. (2008). Kuwait parliament asked to lift two Shia MPs immunity.

⁷⁷² *ShiaChat*. (2008).

⁷⁷³ Power, G. (2012). The Difficult Development of parliamentary Politics in the Gulf: Parliaments and the Process of Managed Reform in Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman. *Kuwait Programme On Development, Governance And Globalisation in the Gulf States*. London School of Economics and Political Science, 7.

⁷⁷⁴ *TMC News*. (2008). Islamists make strong gains.

mosques on public property. The Emir refused to allow the prime minister, his nephew, to be questioned, leading to the resignation of the Cabinet of Ministers in March 2009 and an Emiri decree suspending of the shortest-lived parliament in Kuwait's history (it lasted a mere 10 months).⁷⁷⁵ "It was the fifth occasion on which Sheikh Nasser Mohammed has resigned since he was first appointed prime minister in 2006, and the third time that the emir has reacted by dissolving parliament."⁷⁷⁶ The Emir announced his decision to dissolve parliament in a speech in which he stated that "the parliament had overstepped the boundaries between it and other authorities, and that it had debased the concept of dialogue by hounding its interpellation targets and casting doubt on their personal integrity".⁷⁷⁷

Elections for a new parliament were held on May 16, 2009. The 2009 election produced three notable outcomes. First, voter turnout significantly dropped to around 55% from the average of 80% before the cycle of parliamentary dissolutions began. The pattern of dissolutions followed by snap elections had compromised the legitimacy of the elections themselves:

*Candidates disliked the hassle and expense of running so often just to serve for a year or two...Citizens found the frequent elections both disruptive and annoying regardless of when they were scheduled and many voters just stayed home.*⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁵ Alshayji, A. (2009). The 2009 Kuwaiti Parliamentary Election: The Challenges and the future of the Kuwaiti Democratic Paradigm. *Department of International Relations and American Studies Unit*, Kuwait University, Kuwait.

⁷⁷⁶ *The Economist*. (2009). Dissolution in Kuwait.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Tetreault (2013), 4.

Second, the election produced seats for four women MPs for the first time. Their ascendance to parliamentary politics was a huge victory for women generally, not only because of the intensive political and social debates that surrounded the issue of women's rights in Kuwait, but also because most of the female MPs finished among the top contenders in their districts.⁷⁷⁹ The third notable outcome was the significant increase of pro-government MPs, mainly at the expense of the Sunni Islamists.⁷⁸⁰ The setback for organised Islamist groups was mainly due to the individualistic nature of the election campaign: "in contrast to the last election, the organised political groups and blocs deliberately abandoned the affiliation of their candidates, who were asked to run mainly as independents."⁷⁸¹ The shift away from group affiliation was apparent both by the number of candidates who declined to run as representatives of a group and by the voters who opted for independents in higher than usual numbers. "The smaller influence of political groups could have been another facet of the voters' desire to elect a parliament sufficiently different from its predecessors that it would take a new tack on policy."⁷⁸²

However, despite the change in the composition of parliament in the 2009 Assembly, the same parliamentary discourse and debates continued. A political analyst at the time commented:

There is...a preponderance of opinion, within both the state and society, that parliamentary questioning of government officials is proper. Therefore, the possibility that MPs will resume their efforts to pin down the Prime Minister and

⁷⁷⁹ Alshayji (2009).

⁷⁸⁰ Power (2012), 7.

⁷⁸¹ Alshayji (2009).

⁷⁸² Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

*that the parliament will be dissolved again, possibly unconstitutionally continues to loom on the horizon.*⁷⁸³

As such, the 2009 Assembly continued to press for the interpellation of the prime minister and three other ministers. Finally, after receiving a statement in support of the prime minister signed by 30 of the 50 elected members, the Emir agreed to let him be questioned, but demanded that the interpellation be conducted behind closed doors. On December 8, 2009, Sheikh Nasser was forced to submit to interpellation in a closed-session grilling where he would respond to allegations of corruption and bribery in the earlier 2008 elections.⁷⁸⁴ The subsequent vote of no confidence was held the next day; only 13 members voted against him, one abstained, and the rest, including all four women, voted in his support.⁷⁸⁵

The interpellation of the prime minister represented a crucial moment in Kuwait's political history, where for the first time in the Gulf region, a head of government had appeared before an elected body.⁷⁸⁶ However, the Emir had only allowed the questioning to occur when he was able to gather enough support in parliament to win the vote of no confidence, thus ensuring that the prime minister and the three other ministers that were questioned would survive. So, in practice, the interpellation did not elevate the institution to become a more powerful or influential legislature. Furthermore, although the interpellation of the prime minister was undoubtedly a significant step in the history of

⁷⁸³ Alshayji (2009).

⁷⁸⁴ Tetreault, M. (2012). Kuwait's Impending Elections: How did we get here? *Middle East Research and Information Project*.

⁷⁸⁵ Tetreault (2013), 4.

⁷⁸⁶ Katzman, K. (2013). Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy. *CRS Report for Congress*.

the Assembly, the incident highlighted the relative weakness of parliament in relation to government. It reflected the Kuwaiti leadership's traditional strategy of manipulating the opposition and securing its authority over parliament.⁷⁸⁷ On the other hand, the interpellation set a precedent for allowing prime ministers to be questioned by parliament. Although some members of the 2009 Assembly had to forego any satisfaction they might have received from ousting a disliked prime minister, the interpellation paved the way for future parliaments to question the head of government and at some future time, vote him out of office.⁷⁸⁸ Overall, the incident led to an increase in the number of ministerial interpellations in 2010; and with each interpellation of a minister, the mechanism of questioning became redundant, and in many ways a political tool in the hands of both the opposition and the government.

*Such developments were a cause of dismay for many in parliament, not simply because the interpellation mechanism suddenly looked far less effective, but also because of the way in which the tool was being used by politicians ... they were being used in what one MP described as an increasingly 'frivolous' fashion.*⁷⁸⁹

Although the interpellation of the prime minister had led to a superficial stability between the Assembly and the government, this was soon disrupted in 2011, when the familiar cycle of “parliamentary obstruction, ministerial resistance, government resignation, and looming constitutional crisis” returned.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁷ Power (2012), 7.

⁷⁸⁸ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

⁷⁸⁹ Power (2012), 7.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

Overall, the Kuwaiti cycle of parliamentary elections and dissolutions reflects a historical struggle between the executive and legislative arms of government; where the legislature demands its constitutional right to share political power and the executive continues to assert its authority over parliament. Elections became instruments of authoritarianism, where they “can elide issues that aggravate social divisions and confirm executive autocracy rather than beat it back”.⁷⁹¹ The 2009 election campaign, for example, portrayed a regression from the prospect of legalised political parties when candidates began running as independents in order to increase their chances of winning. The employment of new IT practices was another key development in the election process, where media-savvy candidates would use social media outlets such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, as well as text messaging, to disseminate information and marketing material to voters in their districts. At times, media outlets played a negative role, targeting some MPs with smear campaigns and leading to ‘corrupt media’ and an increase in divisions within society. Social divisions have always provided the ruling family with the ability to manipulate and shift coalition alliances to bolster their position.⁷⁹²

Meanwhile, the most effective political reform came from grass-roots movements applying pressure on the regime to extend political rights. This was demonstrated by the fight for women’s rights and the Orange Movement in 2006. “... [T]he assembly of youth from all over the country in front of parliament ... show that highly focused movements

⁷⁹¹ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

⁷⁹² Alshayji (2009).

entirely rooted in domestic politics can [also] be effective.”⁷⁹³ The regime demonstrated its vulnerability to broadly based, highly public, civil society action; in response to grass-roots outbursts from below, it utilised the legislative process to impose strategic sabotage from above. The frequency of parliament dissolutions and the subsequent election of new ones is a mechanism by the leadership tantamount to narrowing civil rights and liberties.⁷⁹⁴

*The Emir’s strategy of calling election after election, with the effect of alienating Kuwaiti voters, depressing voter turnout, and delegitimising the entire electoral enterprise and the parliament it produces, shows how elections become instruments of authoritarianism.*⁷⁹⁵

The leadership’s assault on representative institutions has thus led to a continual struggle between parliament and government. The struggle was highlighted during the events of the Arab Spring in 2011, where popular pressure from below, opposition groupings within parliament, and a leadership competition within the ruling family all contributed to the challenges that faced the Kuwaiti monarchy.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the gradual transformations that occurred throughout the development of parliamentary politics in Kuwait form the basis of the dynamics of Kuwaiti politics today. Each historical leadership decision, from engaging with various social coalitions,

⁷⁹³ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

⁷⁹⁴ Tetreault, M. (2013). Dissent and Citizens' Rights in Kuwait (Part One): The Limits of Electoral Democracy. *Jadaliyya*.

⁷⁹⁵ Tetreault (2011). Bottom-Up Democratization in Kuwait.

refraining from repression, providing economic benefits, and overall, installing an (albeit imperfect) inclusive political system, has led to the political issues that emerged during the Arab Spring. This chapter briefly examined the three phases of parliamentary politics in Kuwait, beginning in 1963 until 2010. It highlighted the mechanisms which the Kuwaiti government mobilised to respond to internal and external crisis, usually involving the shuffling of domestic (and by that time politicised) coalitions and interfering in parliamentary politics to quell demands for reform and restore the sovereignty of the regime. Even though these mechanisms have been largely successful, new problems are emerging as a consequence of earlier political manoeuvring.⁷⁹⁶ Accordingly, the region-wide impact of the Arab Spring led to the intrepidity of some political dissenters including parliamentarians, and even individual youths through social media, who questioned and, in some cases, insulted the Emir. The consolidation of a cross-coalition that included all social groups within Kuwaiti society was also extremely alarming to the ruling elite. To respond to the domestic turbulence of the Arab Spring, the Kuwaiti leadership thus turned to external support in the form of the GCC. As this chapter has shown in its analysis, the Kuwaiti leadership has utilised several mechanisms throughout decades of parliamentary politics to preserve its regime, including manipulating coalitions and impeding parliamentary elections. However, as the case study will prove, the intensity of the Arab Spring demonstrations prompted the leadership to turn to outside support and strengthen its alliance within the GCC, using the organisation as another mechanism for regime preservation.

⁷⁹⁶ Crystal (1990), 110.

Chapter 4

Kuwait, the GCC and the Arab Spring (2011–2012)

Case Study

I. Introduction

This chapter presents a case study on Kuwait in the context of the GCC and the Arab Spring. Kuwait experienced unprecedented street demonstrations in 2011/12, where the emergence of a cross-coalition that included various social groups within Kuwaiti society echoed regional aspirations for political reform. The case study aims to answer why and how the Kuwaiti leadership was able to overcome the political turbulence of the Arab Spring, and how it began to engage the GCC as a vital participant in securing its regime against internal dissent. It highlights the extent of the role of the GCC in the Kuwaiti leadership's response to its demonstrations and portrays how the threat of regime change in the region reinforced an existing logic of unity among GCC member states. The case study corroborates this research's hypothesis that argues that the Gulf monarchies have utilised their alliance, the GCC, as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring. This chapter examines the Arab Spring in Kuwait between early 2011 and late 2012, the research basing this period on the beginning and end of the timeline of street

demonstrations and government responses in Kuwait.⁷⁹⁷ The last set of demonstrations took place towards the end of 2012; this was followed by a period of stability and, according to this research, marks the end of the Arab Spring in Kuwait. It goes on to provide details on the demands of the demonstrators, and their ethnic/religious/social backgrounds. Kuwaiti citizens from various social and ethnic backgrounds came together in mass demonstrations demanding government accountability and an end to the political stagnation that had set the country back in terms of economic prosperity and opportunity.

The chapter proceeds to explore the Kuwaiti leadership's response to the demonstrations and its utilisation of three tactics under the wider GCC strategy for regime preservation: enhancing its legitimacy, heightening its internal security, and collaborating in a defence scheme. The first tactic, of enhancing legitimacy, involved providing financial incentives to its citizens and reinforcing government-sponsored youth programmes to engage Kuwaiti youth. The second tactic, of heightening internal security, meant various restrictions applied by the Kuwaiti leadership during the Arab Spring, ranging from police violence to media censorship and arrests. The third tactic engaged Kuwait in a collaborative defence scheme along with fellow GCC member states by signing the GCC Internal Security Agreement in November 2012. The employment of these tactics indicates that the Kuwaiti government felt threatened by the Arab Spring and feared the complete destruction of its regime structure. Overall, the case study proves that by utilising tactics under the broader GCC strategy for regime preservation, the Kuwaiti leadership allowed unprecedented GCC interference in its domestic affairs and thus

⁷⁹⁷ A timeline of the Arab Spring in Kuwait is available in the Appendix.

engaged the organisation as a vital participant in preserving its regime during the Arab Spring.

II. Kuwait and the Arab Spring (2011–2012)

The popular demonstrations that occurred in Kuwait in 2011 were the result of previous domestic mobilisation in a country with a long history of public debate and political mobilisation.⁷⁹⁸ Although the Emir is at the top of the hierarchy of political power, Kuwaiti citizens are engaged in the political system through an elected parliament with legislative powers. In addition to the 50 elected members of the National Assembly, the 15 appointed (by the Emir) cabinet members have the right to vote in parliament. This gives a tremendous advantage to the government and reflects a political system where conflicts between parliament and government are inherent. According to Shafeeq Ghabra, “Kuwait’s partial democracy breeds crisis.”⁷⁹⁹ The Emir also has legislative powers and all bills must be approved by both parliament and the Emir, which leads to recurring stalemate.⁸⁰⁰

As the previous chapters in this research have demonstrated, the Kuwaiti leadership utilised its oil resources in preserving a wide social base, providing economic and political benefits to all Kuwaiti citizens in return for their loyalty to the regime. As a primary strategy in preserving its regime, it maintained coalitional alliances in order to discourage the emergence of political dissent among its citizens. The diversity of social

⁷⁹⁸ Dazi-heni (2015).

⁷⁹⁹ Ghabra, S. (2014). Kuwait: At the Crossroads of Change or Political Stagnation. *Middle East Institute*, Policy Papers series, No. 2.

⁸⁰⁰ Dazi-heni (2015).

groups within Kuwaiti society plays a crucial role in the ability of the leadership to maintain and stabilise its mass support.⁸⁰¹

The cross-coalition opposition that formed during the Arab Spring demonstrations in Kuwait put an end to the leadership's reliance on mass coalitional support. It included a youth movement mostly hailing from the tribal periphery and was joined by the traditional urban middle class. The shift from allegiance to opposition among major parts of the tribal population over a decade significantly transformed the balance of power in Kuwaiti politics.⁸⁰² The key element of the Arab Spring in Kuwait is the emergence of a cross-coalition opposition inside and outside parliament. In the past, the Kuwaiti leadership had been able to shift its coalition alliances within parliament in order to manipulate and control the political system. However, the new broad-based opposition became a main destabilising factor and impacted the leadership's ability to maintain its grip on power. Another key element of the Arab Spring in Kuwait is the nature of the demands made by the opposition: the demonstrators were not calling for regime change like other Arab Spring demonstrators in the Middle East region. Rather, they emphasised their commitment to the Emir, and called for "activation of the constitutional monarchy" with the aim of securing an elected government.⁸⁰³ These demands might not echo the chants of regime removal heard in other Arab countries; however, they did call for a complete transformation of the Kuwaiti political system. Thus, the Kuwaiti leadership perceived the opposition and the Arab Spring demonstrations as threats to its regime.

⁸⁰¹ Yom (2011), 220.

⁸⁰² Dazi-heni (2015).

⁸⁰³ *Gulf News*. (2012). Kuwait opposition accuses government of 'plotting coup.'

Throughout 2011 and 2012, parliamentary sessions were dominated by outspoken opposition members pressing for their constitutional right to question ministers and members of the ruling family on alleged corruption charges. A key turning point in the Kuwaiti Arab Spring was in October 2012, when the Emir issued a decree changing the electoral system by limiting voters to the choice of one candidate, in contrast to the previous four candidates per district. In the absence of political parties, having only one vote in a district with around 70 to 100 competitors, “stood to fragment votes and promote electoral corruption, such as vote buying”.⁸⁰⁴ The opposition argued that by minimising the voting power of each person, the new voting system would consistently produce pro-government legislatures. It orchestrated a massive boycott of the following elections (in December and July 2013), resulting in the lowest level of participation since the establishment of parliamentary elections in 1963: approximately 38% of voters went to the polls in the July 2013 election.⁸⁰⁵ The elections thus produced pro-government parliaments and excluded the opposition from parliamentary politics.

By issuing an irreversible decree that was to take effect immediately; the Emir opened the door to further dissent from among the citizen population. Criticism by a myriad of opposition figures, activists and bloggers began to spread to not only government ministers and the ruling family, but the Emir himself. This important transitional shift in the tone of the opposition, from demanding constitutional rights to publically insulting and criticising the Emir, led to an explosion of police violence and repression and a clampdown on freedom of expression by the Kuwaiti authorities. Interestingly, it also led

⁸⁰⁴ Ghabra (2014).

⁸⁰⁵ Dazi-heni (2015).

to the disenfranchisement of the cross-coalition opposition, where it lost substantial public support due to unclear goals. Throughout 2012, the opposition organised large demonstrations calling for the boycott of parliamentary elections; however, it did not have a specific agenda after the July 2013 elections. The boycott manoeuvre ultimately led to the end of the Arab Spring, weakening the opposition and making it strategically obsolete.

a. Who are the Opposition?

The Arab Spring generated a new coalition of government opposition represented by groups inside and outside the Kuwaiti National Assembly. The opposition consisted of a mix of Sunni Islamists, liberals, tribalists, trade unions, student unions and youth coalitions. The parliamentary blocs that joined the opposition during the Arab Spring are:⁸⁰⁶ the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood), the Popular Islamic bloc (the Salafis), the National Democratic Alliance (the liberals), the Popular Action bloc (PAB) and a few tribalists and independents.⁸⁰⁷ Leading opposition figures include Mussalam Al-Barrak, a former independent MP; Ahmad Al-Saadoun, a former parliament speaker; Jamaan Herbash, a former MP and member of the Muslim Brotherhood; Mohammed Hayef Al-Mutair, an independent Islamist and former MP; another Islamist and former MP, Khaled al-Sultan; and Khaled

⁸⁰⁶ Previous chapter included the various parliamentary groupings in Kuwait.

⁸⁰⁷ Zaaiteer (2012). Kuwait's Opposition: Who Are They?

Al-Fadhala, the spokesman for the National Front for the Protection of the Constitution and secretary-general of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).⁸⁰⁸

The most prominent face from among the opposition is former MP, Mussalam Al-Barrak; in the 2012 election, he garnered more votes than any politician in Kuwait's history.⁸⁰⁹ He became a symbol of dissent when he was charged with "insulting the emir",⁸¹⁰ and was sentenced to two years in prison (more on his arrest later in the chapter).⁸¹¹ Al-Barrak, the son of a former MP (Mohammed Al-Barrak), made his debut in parliament in 1996, and gradually rose to prominence as a member of the parliamentary grouping, the PAB.⁸¹² On entering the National Assembly, he followed the path of his father and relied on the support of his powerful Al-Mutair tribe. The Al-Mutair is one of the tribes that were naturalised by the government in the 1950s, and politically empowered as a counterweight to the more demanding political force of Kuwait's urban core (the 1950s era was much concerned with Arab nationalist politics). Since the 1950s, however, "this politically quiescent population became more educated, more exposed to the outside world, and less content with their parliamentary 'service candidates' which faithfully brought jobs and benefits in exchange for their political loyalty".⁸¹³ The strength of the Arab Spring coalition stems from widespread social and political change among the tribes' younger generation. The politicised tribal movement, mainly

⁸⁰⁸ Zaaier, H. (2012). Did Kuwait's Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat to the Regime? *Al-Monitor*.

⁸⁰⁹ Diwan (2013).

⁸¹⁰ Dickinson, E. (2014). Kuwait's Opposition: A Reawakening. *The Economist*.

⁸¹¹ *Kuwait Times*. (2015). Barrak Handed Two Years in Prison for Insulting Emir.

⁸¹² Toumi, H. (2012). Who is Musallam Al Barrak? *Gulf News*.

⁸¹³ Diwan (2013).

comprising well-educated youth, has contributed to a change in the “traditional” practices of tribal opposition, which mainly consisted of campaigning to obtain additional resources from the state.⁸¹⁴ Al-Barrak represented this new generation, embodying the significant social changes taking place in Kuwait’s tribal constituencies.⁸¹⁵ He refused to participate in the tribal primaries (preliminary elections to determine which candidate will represent the tribe in the parliamentary elections),⁸¹⁶ which are illegal in Kuwait but widely held by tribes in order to maximise their presence in parliament. His independence, along with his rhetoric against government corruption, won him supporters among the second generation members of his tribe and beyond his tribe as well.

Within parliament, Al-Barrak sought a partnership and consulship with a notable opposition leader and former speaker of parliament, Ahmed Al-Saadoun. Al-Saadoun is known for his “staunch defense of the parliament against the executive and for his detailed knowledge of parliamentary procedure”.⁸¹⁷ In 2001, the two figures played a central role in the formation of the PAB, a cross-coalition of “like-minded MPs pursuing populist economic policies and committed to strong parliamentary oversight of public money and constitutional protections”.⁸¹⁸ The bloc was an innovative grouping among Kuwait’s parliamentary blocs; it incorporated a variety of MPs from both tribal and urban constituencies, and from both Shi’a and Sunni Islamist backgrounds. The prominence of tribal MPs among an explicitly oppositional and national parliamentary coalition

⁸¹⁴ Dazi-heni (2015).

⁸¹⁵ Diwan (2013).

⁸¹⁶ Smith (1999), 7.

⁸¹⁷ Diwan (2013).

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

reflected the increasing political maturity of Kuwait's tribes, and their growing political weight.

According to political analyst, Kristin Diwan, Al-Barrak is an important political figure in Kuwait: "[F]or the past two decades Mussalam Al-Barrak has shown a talent for transgressing the rules of Kuwaiti politics. His ascent to the leadership of Kuwait's diverse opposition movement reflects not only a shifting political order, but also a changing society."⁸¹⁹ In October 2012, Al-Barrak had a leading role in the demonstrations resisting the Emiri decree that amended the Electoral Law (more details later in the chapter). He shocked many observers by publically challenging the Emir in a speech he gave at an opposition rally against the amendment. In his speech, he addressed the Emir, saying: "In the name of the nation, in the name of the people, we will not let you, your Highness, practice autocratic rule."⁸²⁰ He further reminded him that like his ancestor, the first Sabahi Emir, whom the people chose to be their leader, he was chosen by the National Assembly (referring to the succession crisis in 2003). Al-Barrak stressed that it was the Kuwaiti constitution and the role of the National Assembly that brought the Emir to the throne in 2003; because of this, the Emir should respect the constitution and safeguard the law. He further alleged a suspicious alliance between the "merchants of corruption and the merchants of power, adding that Kuwait is being destroyed and its wealth stolen".⁸²¹ He was detained a couple of days after his speech on a charge of

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

⁸²⁰ AlziadiQ8. (2015). Musallam Al-Barrak's full speech.

⁸²¹ Izzak, B. (2014). Oppn launches rebranded popular action movement. *Kuwait Times*.

“undermining the status of the Emir”.⁸²² Al-Barrak was not the only opposition member who was indicted for criticising the Emir during the Arab Spring: among many, three former MPs, Falah Al-Sawwagh, Bader Al-Dahum and Khaled Al-Tahus, were also detained for three days for criticising the Emir at an opposition rally on October 10, 2012.⁸²³

Not everyone agreed with the opposition during the Arab Spring; many urban Kuwaitis questioned Al-Barrak’s motives in leading demonstrations against the government and blamed him for driving the country further into crisis.⁸²⁴ Moreover, the broad-based opposition coalition had united several groups with differing beliefs on how the country should proceed.⁸²⁵ Al-Barrak’s tribal and Islamist support base raised suspicions among secular Kuwaitis, who were wary of the Islamists’ agenda. One of the ICM’s primary demands as part of the opposition coalition was the amendment of Article 2 of the Constitution to proclaim Islamic (Shari’a) law the sole source of legislation.⁸²⁶ Liberals and nationalists have thus accused the ICM of conspiring to create a new caliphate under the orders of the Egyptian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸²⁷ A member of a liberal political bloc, Bassam Al-Asoussi, declared: “Yes, the government has many shortcomings indeed, but [the opposition leaders] aren't the people who will

⁸²² *BBC News*. (2013). Kuwait opposition leader al-Barrak's sentence quashed.

⁸²³ *RT International*. (2012). Opposition arrests in Kuwait: Political standoff deepens.

⁸²⁴ Diwan (2013).

⁸²⁵ *RT International*. (2012). Opposition arrests in Kuwait: Political standoff deepens.

⁸²⁶ Freer, C. (2015). Exclusion-Moderation: The emergence of Islamist cooperation with secular groups in Kuwait. *The Brookings Institution*.

⁸²⁷ Black, I. (2012). Kuwait emir's change to election rules stirs signs of Arab spring. *The Guardian*.

save the country. They are regressive, not progressive.”⁸²⁸ Another liberal MP, Safa’ Al-Hashem, disagreed with the tone of the opposition, claiming that the opposition was “obsolete” and their protests vulgar. She stated: “My views have shifted from left to right. I am against the way the opposition is behaving. I understand why they are against the one-man-one-vote but this country is still being run by a tribal mentality. The law is only enforced selectively.”⁸²⁹

Nevertheless, while government supporters were outspoken against the opposition, many recoiled at the interventionist police tactics that were deployed by the authorities during the Arab Spring demonstrations.⁸³⁰ The government used police violence and arrests as key tactics in suppressing the demonstrations during the Arab Spring, to which many liberals took offence. In protest against the arrest of a liberal opposition figure, Khaled Al-Fadhala, for criticising the prime minister in December 2010, Abdulrahman Al-Anjari, a liberal former MP stated: “I remember during the time of previous emirs and previous prime ministers, the opposition in Kuwait used to criticise the government, the prime minister in so many things. Nobody took anyone to court.”⁸³¹ Many Kuwaitis were shocked at the mass arrests that occurred during the demonstrations of the Arab Spring, and perceived the clampdown on freedom of expression in the country as a violation of the ruler/ruled relationship. A prominent writer who was gaoled for his criticism of public officials, Mohammed Al-Jassem, expressed it thus: “It seems the government is losing focus and they don’t know what they are doing. I think they are destroying the country

⁸²⁸ *RT International*. (2012). Opposition arrests in Kuwait: Political standoff deepens.

⁸²⁹ Black (2012).

⁸³⁰ Diwan (2013).

⁸³¹ Calderwood (2010).

one way or another. And they are badly affecting the relationship between the Al-Sabah family and the Kuwaiti people. This is all new.”⁸³²

The Kuwait government’s violent and restrictive response to the opposition during the Arab Spring mirrored the response of other GCC leaderships; the Bahraini and Saudi leaderships both used harsh measures in suppressing their own demonstrations. This research thus argues that due to the threat of the Arab Spring demonstrations, the Kuwaiti leadership had to choose between maintaining its citizens’ rights under the Kuwaiti constitution, or following its own interests by aligning its strategy for regime preservation with fellow GCC members. The emergence of a broad-based coalition that included members from various political, ethnic and religious backgrounds created a huge threat to the leadership, where it no longer had the ability to manipulate coalitions as a way to control parliament. Furthermore, public allegations and accusations by the opposition of corrupt government officials and in policymaking discredited the leadership in the eyes of the Kuwaiti public. The Arab Spring demonstrations thus prompted the Kuwaiti leadership to join forces with its more conservative Saudi and Bahraini neighbours, and apply a GCC strategy for regime preservation through the tactics of police violence, mass arrests, and restricting freedom of expression. It further signalled its increased commitment to cooperation by signing the contested GCC Internal Security Agreement, which many Kuwaitis rejected on the basis of its infringement of the Kuwaiti constitution (more on this later in the chapter).

⁸³² Ibid.

b. The Role of the Kuwaiti Youth

Kuwait's youth (taken in this research as the 18–30 age group) represent 60% of the total citizen population.⁸³³ Throughout 2011 and 2012, Kuwaiti youth joined forces with parliament opposition members and planned mass demonstrations that matched the spirit of the Arab Spring in the wider region. The importance of the union between youth and opposition is in the crosscutting coalitions that surfaced: during the demonstrations, the youth represented citizens from various ethnic, religious and social backgrounds within Kuwaiti society, providing the opposition with a broader base. Youth groups succeeded in creating a new political dynamic within the Kuwaiti political scene. Their main goal was to promote political mobilisation across all segments of Kuwaiti society, focusing on a call for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy where citizens would be equal.⁸³⁴ During the 2012 election campaign they gathered under the name “Fifth Fence” (al-Soor al-Khames) in support of the liberals running for parliament.⁸³⁵ The name refers to a road (the fifth ring road) which divides the old urban city and the new districts, often referred to as the “outlying areas”, where the bulk of the tribal population has been living since the urbanisation wave that began in the late sixties.⁸³⁶ It thus symbolises the social segregation that exists in Kuwaiti society between “urban” (Hadhar) and “tribal” (Bedouin) Kuwaitis.⁸³⁷ The Fifth Fence brings together activists from various ideologies and sects, and was the first broad-based coalition group established after riot police beat a

⁸³³ *Ministry Of State For Youth Affairs*. (n.d.). Kuwait Youth Index.

⁸³⁴ Dazi-heni (2015).

⁸³⁵ Katzman (2016).

⁸³⁶ Dazi-heni (2015).

⁸³⁷ More details in chapter three.

number of MPs at a rally in December 2010. Since then, several youth groups like Kafi (Enough), Youth for Change, September 16 Youth, the Civil Democratic Movement (CDM) and others were established and began working in close coordination to call for political reform and to fight against corruption.⁸³⁸ These youth groups were using social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook to inspire followers to demonstrate on the streets.⁸³⁹

In a region where so many young people have poor prospects and are underemployed, Kuwaiti youth are granted scholarships, secure jobs and generous salaries by the government.⁸⁴⁰ Yet, thousands of young Kuwaitis took to the streets in protest against government policies during the Arab Spring. Kuwaiti youths have repeatedly said they are not against the Al-Sabah ruling family, but do want radical changes.⁸⁴¹ According to this research, the demands of Kuwaiti youth revolved around three main issues: wanting an active voice in government and their overall future; unemployment or lack of economic opportunities; and social issues. A journalist, Sylvia Westall, while reporting at a demonstration in Kuwait in November 2012, asked the crucial question: Why are Kuwaiti youth so dissatisfied?⁸⁴² The answer, for Abdullah Ashkanani, who like more than half of Kuwaitis is under the age of 25, is about fairness and the freedom to speak

⁸³⁸ *Hurriyet Daily News*. (2012). Youth groups play key role in Kuwait elections.

⁸³⁹ Ghosh, P. (2011). Youths in Kuwait to challenge government with unauthorized protests. *International Business Times*.

⁸⁴⁰ Westall (2012). Pampered but Restless, Many Young Kuwaitis Want More.

⁸⁴¹ *Hurriyet Daily News*. (2012).

⁸⁴² Westall (2012). Pampered but Restless, Many Young Kuwaitis Want More.

out. Despite the many benefits that accrue to all Kuwaitis, the authorities do not seem to distribute the country's wealth and power fairly. He states:

*One day we will get married and have children and we want them to have a fair, equal life. It is not about money. It is also about freedom and freedom of speech. Do not think you can give us money and we will sit at home and shut our mouths.*⁸⁴³

Kuwait's youth want a voice in government decisions and to become agents of change. The cycle of parliamentary dissolutions followed by snap elections that began in 2006 had led many Kuwaiti youth to believe that they could not seek change through elections. As one youth protestor stated: "The problem in Kuwait is that the people do not feel like they run the country. We don't have an elected prime minister and the government is appointed. It is always someone else making the decisions."⁸⁴⁴

Many of Kuwait's youth were also protesting about the future of their country, which while it may currently be fiscally sound, depends on oil for more than 90% of its revenues and has struggled to diversify its economy for years. The official unemployment rate in Kuwait is around 3% (2010).⁸⁴⁵ Kuwait's youth made up a significant percentage of the total unemployed population during the decade 2001 to 2009. In 2008, Kuwait's youth made up 53% of the unemployed population.⁸⁴⁶ The reason for the low unemployment rate is a government policy of securing employment in the public sector;

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ Beidas-Strom, S. et al. (2011). Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC): Enhancing Economic Outcomes in an Uncertain Global Economy. *International Monetary Fund*.

⁸⁴⁶ Almunajjed & Sabbagh (2011).

this might be considered a form of welfare policy.⁸⁴⁷ The public sector employs over 80% of the Kuwaiti workforce. The overcrowded public sector provides higher salaries and less work hours than the private sector, leading Kuwaiti citizens with little incentive to seek employment in the private sector.⁸⁴⁸ However, the random selection and hiring and the practice of favouritism due to a bloated public sector has led to several reports of mismanagement of public funds. Government efficiency is thus hindered by the lack of professionalism in public administration and a large portion of government expenditure goes on the cost of employing an overcrowded public sector.⁸⁴⁹

A key argument made by government opposition and youth participants of the mass demonstrations of the Arab Spring is the image of economic stagnation in comparison to the more vibrant economies of neighbouring Gulf states such as Qatar and the UAE. This image of stagnation is mainly due to delayed spending on capital infrastructure projects, augmented by a lag in foreign direct investment in Kuwait in comparison to other GCC states.⁸⁵⁰ Finally, some among the Kuwaiti youth are frustrated by social restrictions, where men and women are segregated in universities and there is a lack of places for them to socialise outside the home. Some even voiced their concerns at Kuwait's strong social and political ties to Saudi Arabia, its more conservative neighbour. In Westall's article, a young Kuwaiti woman states: "We don't like the very strict Muslims, the

⁸⁴⁷ *Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Center for Applied Policy Research*. (2009). BTI 2010- Kuwait Country Report. Munich University.

⁸⁴⁸ *Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Center for Applied Policy Research*. (2014).

⁸⁴⁹ *Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Center for Applied Policy Research*. (2009).

⁸⁵⁰ Only \$800 million has been invested in Kuwait in the past 10 years. In contrast, in the same time period, \$10 billion was invested in Bahrain, \$73 billion in UAE, and \$130 billion. In Katzman (2013). Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy.

Salafis, they want to make Kuwait like Saudi Arabia and restrict women, to stop us from being able to drive.’’⁸⁵¹

III. The Arab Spring Demonstrations in Kuwait (2010–2012)

This research divides the events of the Arab Spring in Kuwait into three sets of demonstrations: the Bidoon demonstrations; those targeting the removal of the prime minister; and demonstrations calling for democratic reforms within the Kuwaiti political system. All three sets of demonstrations occurred within the timeframe of January 2011 to 2012. Each revolved around specific issues; two out of the three attendant demands have not been resolved or accepted by the government, while one demand, the removal of the prime minister, succeeded in prompting the leadership to make a change. The reason for the distinctions made between these three sets of demonstrations that occurred during the Arab Spring in Kuwait is twofold: first, the demonstrations are presented chronologically and it is presupposed that each set of demonstration set the precedent for the next to occur; second, each set of demonstrations highlights deep grievances within the Kuwaiti political system. The link between the Bidoon demonstrations and the demonstrations targeting the removal of the prime minister lies in the solidarity displayed between the Bidoon and the Kuwaiti political activists and parliament members. A key lesson of the Bidoon demonstrations for the next two sets of demonstrations in Kuwait was the necessity to publicise demands by attracting media attention and highlighting the cause. The Bidoon demonstrations prompted extremely violent reactions from the Kuwaiti government; the use of police violence and mass arrests were first seen during

⁸⁵¹ Westall, S. (2012). Pampered but Restless, Many Young Kuwaitis Want More. *Reuters*.

these demonstrations, regardless of the peaceful intentions of the protestors. The reaction of Kuwaiti citizens, as shown by the media, to the government's harsh response to the Bidoon demonstrations also became a silent trigger for the events that followed, when Kuwaiti political activists began to use the platform of street protest as a way to demand change from their government.

Another reason for the distinctions made between the three sets of demonstrations are the particular issues at the centre of each: key issues with deep roots within the Kuwaiti political system. The Bidoon demonstrations issue highlighted the social and economic divisions within the population and called attention to the discrepancies of the Nationality Law of 1959. The demonstrations demanding the removal of the prime minister highlighted the importance of the historical social contract between the Kuwaiti leader and society. And the demonstrations demanding democratic reforms represent the significance of the Kuwaiti constitution and its impact on the Kuwaiti political culture. Thus, the three sets of demonstrations are not only linked to each other, but are also linked to the origins of Kuwaiti politics. The following sections aims to describe the details of each set of demonstrations, the demands of the protestors, and finally the Kuwaiti government's response.

a. The Bidoon Demonstrations

In January 2011, the Emir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, announced that all Kuwaiti citizens would be given 1,000 KD (around \$3,000) and a free food grant for an entire year to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Kuwait's liberation from Iraq in 1991 and the 50th anniversary of Kuwait's independence from the British protectorate

system.⁸⁵² The food grant would be effective from February 2011 until March 2012, costing the government 230 million KD (\$818 million). Excluded from these cash and food grants were the Bidoon community, long-time residents who have been denied Kuwaiti citizenship and are rendered stateless. The Bidoon account for almost 6% of the total population of Kuwait – around 150,000 to 180,000 people. The Kuwaiti constitution does not officially recognise statelessness, and so the Bidoon find themselves discriminated against in many ways: they are “barred from employment, denied education for their children, restricted in their movements, and living under the constant threat of arbitrary arrest and deportation.”⁸⁵³ They “cannot obtain marriage licences, driver’s licences, or birth certificates, which resultantly makes owning property, traveling outside the country, or legally establishing a family, fairly impossible. Over time, their precarious position has contributed to increasing prejudice, poverty, and growing hopelessness for the future.”⁸⁵⁴

The case of the Bidoon has been a primary issue with regard to human rights in Kuwait, and is closely monitored by international human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), UNHCR and the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.⁸⁵⁵ In 2004, the Kuwaiti government took a positive step to address access to education for Bidoon children. The Ministry of Education approved free

⁸⁵² As of June 2010, Kuwaiti citizens amounted to 1.12 million. In Kholaf, D. (2011). Kuwaitis’ Free Food Grant to Cost \$818 Million, KUNA Reports. *Bloomberg*.

⁸⁵³ *Human Rights Watch*. (1995). The Bedoons of Kuwait.

⁸⁵⁴ Kamel, S. (2013). Kuwait's Bidoon and the Arab Spring. *KEMMIS*.

⁸⁵⁵ *U.S. Department of State*. (2009). 2008 Human Rights Report: Kuwait. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor*. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

education for all Bidoon children; however, this right was limited in many cases due to the lack of birth certificates. Many Bidoon children are still only able to access private schools. Although members of the Bidoon community are not eligible to be members of the National Assembly, their case has been discussed and debated by MPs who support their rights. In 2006, the National Assembly created a committee to deal with the Bidoon issue; however, the Assembly has otherwise failed to be an effective platform for the Bidoon. Any laws that were proposed on concerning Bidoon rights were never passed. A new agency was thus formed, the Central System to Resolve Illegal Residents' Status, a government body tasked to oversee the Bidoon's situation and address their grievances.⁸⁵⁶

The Bidoon began their first set of demonstrations in Kuwait on February 18, 2011, where they called for access to healthcare, education, employment and their right to Kuwaiti citizenship. According to local activists, approximately 300 to 500 people participated in the demonstration, in the outskirts of Kuwait City (the areas of Taima', Sulaibiya and Ahmedi). The demonstration was peaceful at first, ending, however, in extreme police violence, where "security forces used water cannons, teargas, smoke bombs and concussion grenades to break up the demonstration."⁸⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch stated around 30 people sought treatment for injuries in hospital, while around 120 individuals were arrested by the state authorities. However, the Kuwaiti Interior Minister announced to HRW that his forces had arrested 42 individuals on charges of assembly without seeking prior permission, as required by Kuwaiti law.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁶ *Human Rights Watch*. (2011). Prisoners of the Past: Kuwaiti Bidun and the Burden of Statelessness.

⁸⁵⁷ *Human Rights Watch*. (2011). Kuwait: Dozens Injured, Arrested in Bidun Crackdown.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

Wary that the Bidoon protests would spiral out of control, the government quickly promised meagre reforms, including access to a few basic rights. In March 2011, the government granted the Bidoon benefits and services such as free healthcare and education, as well as registration of births, marriages, and deaths. However, these benefits do not provide a path to citizenship. Furthermore, some Bidoon complained that bureaucratic processes prevented many from accessing those benefits.⁸⁵⁹ On March 11, thousands of Bidoon took to the streets once again, “chanting that they love their country and their Emir, and that they want their rights”.⁸⁶⁰ They began to organise the protests on Fridays, “making a concerted effort to maintain peaceful protest by handing out flowers to the special forces guarding the demonstrations, offering tea and coffee to the police, and cleaning up garbage after the gatherings”.⁸⁶¹ Nonetheless, the government responded with excessive force, “advancing with armoured vehicles and riot police, employing tear gas and flares to break up crowds, then arbitrarily running after, beating, and detaining random people.”⁸⁶² A number of protestors and organisers were arrested on charges of illegal assembly, intent to commit crimes, and assault of security forces.⁸⁶³ The Ministry of Interior accused protestors of committing “shameful acts” such as trying to burn tyres and block roads. However, local rights activists insisted that the gatherings were

⁸⁵⁹ *Bidoon Rights*. (2013). Human Rights Watch: 180 Bidoon were tried.

⁸⁶⁰ *Open Society Foundations*. (2011). Without Citizenships: Statelessness, Discrimination and Repression in Kuwait.

⁸⁶¹ Kamel, S. (2013). Kuwait's Bidoon and the Arab Spring. *KEMMIS*.

⁸⁶² *Open Society Foundations*. (2011).

⁸⁶³ Al-Saadi, Y. (2012). Kuwait's Bidun: Reviving the Struggle for Status. *Al Akhbar*.

peaceful.⁸⁶⁴ The detained Bidoon were subsequently freed after nearly two weeks. Bidoon demonstrations declined until December 2011, when the trial of 52 Bidoon and other Kuwaitis detained earlier in February and March re-energised the Bidoon community and inspired them to return to the streets in full force.⁸⁶⁵

On December 23, 2011, around five hundred Bidoon gathered in Taima⁸⁶⁶ demanding access to basic services and their right to Kuwaiti citizenship.⁸⁶⁷ This particular demonstration came a day after government officials restated promises to grant the Bidoon citizenship. One of the protestors, Bidoon activist Nawaf al-Bader, insisted that the protests were peaceful and did not call for the removal of the government. Rather, he said, they were about “reasserting nationality and dignity, inspired by the winds of the Arab Spring.”⁸⁶⁸ The vast majority of the protestors were male, and predominately from the younger generation. They would chant “peaceful, peaceful,” referring to their intentions and many held the image of the Emir, chanting “God, Nation, and the Emir” and “We are Kuwaiti.”⁸⁶⁹ There were a number of women protestors, most in the black *niqab*, also holding either a banner calling for citizenship, or an image of the Emir and the Kuwaiti flag. A woman protestor stated: “I have six children with no hope. I can’t educate them and I can’t afford the price of bread. You [those who are not supporting Bidoon rights] have ruined the country by ignoring us! Where can we live? We are

⁸⁶⁴ Kamel, S. (2013). Kuwait's Bedoon and the Arab Spring. *KEMMIS*.

⁸⁶⁵ Al-Saadi, Y. (2012). Kuwait & the Bedoun: A Question of Citizenship. *Muftah*.

⁸⁶⁶ Al-Saadi (2012). Kuwait's Bidun: Reviving the Struggle for Status.

⁸⁶⁷ Kareem, M. (2011). Kuwait: Stateless Protesters Attacked for Demanding Rights. *Global Voices*.

⁸⁶⁸ Al-Saadi (2012). Kuwait's Bidun: Reviving the Struggle for Status.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid.

calling you our Father [the Emir], solve the Bidoon problem!”⁸⁷⁰ Because the Bidoon do not qualify for government jobs, most can only find irregular work that typically brings in around \$600 a month or a little over \$7,000 a year. In a country where the median income is \$81,000 a year, before taking into account subsidised housing and electricity that the government offers citizens, the Bidoon are among the poorest in the country.⁸⁷¹

Images and videos posted on social media sites such as Twitter had played a major role in encouraging Kuwaitis and others to join the Bidoon in the protests at their plight. During the demonstration, “on the sidelines, blood was donated to emphasise solidarity and unity between the Bidoon and Kuwaiti society.”⁸⁷² A Kuwaiti woman present at the demonstration spoke out in solidarity with the Bidoon protestors, stating: “They should demonstrate as long as it’s peaceful and they are not hurting anyone. They have every right. This has become a third generation problem. The new agency said [it would take] five years [to solve], a year has already passed and nothing.”⁸⁷³ By midday, the police increased their presence, and they ended up using tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons and smoke bombs to disperse the protest. The authorities further arrested around 30 men. A Kuwaiti activist present at the protest in Taima’, Khaled Al-Fadala, reported through Twitter: “@Alfadala: Tens of arrests, protesters getting beaten with batons and attacked with gas.”⁸⁷⁴ Another Kuwaiti citizen tweeted: “@AlSaibie: I’m Kuwaiti & I refuse to see

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁷¹ Atkinson, S. (2011). Kuwait's stateless Bidun demand greater rights. *BBC News*.

⁸⁷² Al-Saadi (2012). Kuwait's Bidun: Reviving the Struggle for Status.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ Kareem (2011).

any one oppressed or disrespected in my country. This is a land of freedom & dignity.”⁸⁷⁵

Parliamentarians also spoke out against the police violence during the Bidoon demonstrations; former MP, Jamaan Al-Harbash was quoted as saying: “We call for dealing peacefully with the Bidoon demonstration and warn against the use of force or arresting the protesters.”⁸⁷⁶ Another former MP, Daifallah Buraima, said, “The protest of the Bidoons is legitimate and the government is responsible for this because it has failed to resolve the problem.”⁸⁷⁷ Despite this sentiment, shown by many Kuwaitis, the police crackdown continued.

In January 14, 2012, police again used excessive force against peaceful demonstrators in Sulaibiya and Jahra; Bidoon activists claimed that the demonstrators were protesting “against the excessive and unnecessary use of force by police against the demonstrations” a day earlier.⁸⁷⁸ Human rights activists claim dozens of protestors were wounded; and 68 Bidoon were arrested. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior had said that 21 security men were wounded in the clashes, five of whom were hospitalised.⁸⁷⁹ Later in the month, the Ministry of Interior issued statements threatening the deportation of any Bidoon – or Bidoon family members – who were caught demonstrating. The government also threatened to dismiss any Bidoon protestors who served in the military or police, and evict them from public housing projects.⁸⁸⁰ These threats led to the halt of Bidoon

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁶ *Al-Jazeera*. (2011). Kuwait's stateless rally for rights.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ *Al-Jazeera*. (2012). Kuwait police crackdown on stateless protests.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁰ Kamel, S. (2013). Kuwait's Bedoon and the Arab Spring. KEMMIS .

demonstrations in Kuwait; however, the Bidoon issue remains a contested one and resolution has yet to be found by the government. In March 2013, the National Assembly adopted a proposal to pass a law granting Kuwaiti Nationality to 4,000 Bidoons; however the proposal was never pursued.⁸⁸¹ In November 2014, the Ministry of Interior announced that all Bidoons would be given economic citizenship in the Comoros, an island republic in the Indian Ocean.⁸⁸² According to the authorities, this measure should become effective upon the opening of the Comoros Embassy in Kuwait, scheduled for 2015. It should also be noted that the granting of Comorian nationality to the Bidoons had been initiated by the United Arab Emirates in 2012.⁸⁸³

b. Demonstrations for the Removal of the Prime Minister

Other sets of demonstrations during the Arab Spring involved demands for the removal of the prime minister, and political reform. The interpellation of the prime minister in December 2009 had prompted a short-lived period of stable relations between parliament and the government; however, contention, and specifically demands to remove the prime minister, resumed in December 2010.⁸⁸⁴ On December 28 a broad-based opposition (comprising both Islamists and liberals) in parliament filed a motion to question the Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah, accusing him of being responsible for a police crackdown at a house where MPs and supporters had gathered twenty days earlier. On January 5, 2011, Sheikh Nasser survived a no-confidence vote; 25 MPs voted

⁸⁸¹ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013). Kuwait: Ongoing Decline in Fundamental Freedoms.

⁸⁸² Kareem, M. (2014). Kuwait offers plan to buy foreign citizenship for Bedoon. *Al-Monitor*.

⁸⁸³ Wille, B. (2015). Kuwait's Plan to Pawn Off its 'Stateless'. *Human Rights Watch*.

⁸⁸⁴ See previous chapter on details of the first interpellation of the prime minister.

for, 25 against, and the motion required a majority to pass.⁸⁸⁵ In February 2011, a scheduled interpellation of the Interior Minister prompted his resignation a week before a street rally against him was due to take place.⁸⁸⁶ “Following a motion to question the Prime Minister and other ministers on a range of issues, including Kuwait’s participation in the Bahraini government’s efforts to crush Arab Spring protesters there,”⁸⁸⁷ the Kuwaiti government resigned on March 1, 2011.

The interference of the GCC in the domestic affairs in Bahrain generated heated debate in the Kuwaiti media and parliament. On March 14, 2011, the GCC Peninsula Shield Force entered Bahrain to support the Al-Khalifa monarchy in accordance with the GCC Joint Defense Agreement. The Bahraini monarchy stated that the reason behind the GCC Peninsula Shield Force mission was “the common responsibility of the GCC countries in maintaining security and stability”.⁸⁸⁸ The GCC force consisted mostly of Saudi troops, along with Emirati police and Qatari troops.⁸⁸⁹ The Kuwaiti government refused to send troops, offering, however, an unidentified number of Kuwaiti naval units to engage with the force. The Kuwaiti government was facing different sets of questioning from different groups within parliament over the interpretation of Kuwait’s role in Bahrain: the Salafist Islamic bloc strongly criticised the prime minister and the foreign minister for not fully participating in the GCC military force in Bahrain by

⁸⁸⁵ *Al-Jazeera*. (2011). Kuwait PM survives confidence vote.

⁸⁸⁶ Tetreault (2013).

⁸⁸⁷ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

⁸⁸⁸ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. (2011). Peninsula Shield enter Bahrain to maintain order.

⁸⁸⁹ *Arab Times*. (2012).

sending troops on the ground.⁸⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the Shi'a bloc – specifically, Shi'a parliamentarian Saleh Ashour – asked to question the foreign minister about Kuwait's dispatch of naval forces as part of the GCC military intervention to support Bahrain's government; a decision many Kuwaiti Shi'as opposed as unjustly supporting the Sunni Bahraini monarchy.⁸⁹¹ The strength of various opposition groups and the interpellation of various government officials had triggered the resignation of the government in March 2011. The resignation appeared to be an attempt by members of the ruling Al-Sabah family to avoid being questioned over why Kuwait did not contribute to the Saudi-led ground force that was sent to Bahrain.⁸⁹²

After the government resigned, the Emir reappointed his nephew, the standing Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser, and a new cabinet was sworn in in May.⁸⁹³ To protest the Emir's decision to reinstall Sheikh Nasser to the prime minister post, several members of parliament walked out and another motion of interpellation of the prime minister was submitted.⁸⁹⁴ An influential parliament member, Ahmad al-Saadoun,⁸⁹⁵ had submitted one of the motions of no confidence against the prime minister, stating: “[I]t is wrong to monopolize the post of prime minister in a democratic regime like Kuwait, especially since Sheikh Nasser has formed six failed governments.”⁸⁹⁶ Sheikh Nasser had held the post of Prime Minister since 2006 – a man perceived as ineffective and politically corrupt

⁸⁹⁰ Power (2012), 7.

⁸⁹¹ Katzman (2013). Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy.

⁸⁹² *Huffington Post*. (2011). Kuwait Cabinet Resigns Over Bahrain Crisis.

⁸⁹³ Power (2012), 7.

⁸⁹⁴ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

⁸⁹⁵ He was the Speaker of Parliament from 1985-1999.

⁸⁹⁶ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

by MPs. His leadership in government witnessed 11 parliamentary interpolations, six resignations of the cabinet and the dissolution and early election of parliament three times.⁸⁹⁷ Meanwhile, the Emir perceived these motions of no confidence in the prime minister as a rebellion against his authority. The Emir's concession on the Electoral law in 2006 (where, due to popular demand, he approved the redistricting of the electoral districts from 25 to 5) played a major role in the Emir's determination to dismiss popular demands for his nephew's removal years later. In giving in to the opposition in 2006, a mere three years after his ascension to the throne, this research asserts that the Emir perceived that he had lost the upper hand with the opposition. "Sheikh Sabah protected Sheikh Nasser, refusing to accept any of his pro forma resignations every time a new government was formed, regardless of the desires of elected members of the parliament and eventually of many Kuwaiti citizens for Sheikh Nasser to leave."⁸⁹⁸

On June 3, 2011, around 500 Kuwaiti citizens marched in Erada Square in front of Kuwait's parliament building calling for the resignation of the prime minister, Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah.⁸⁹⁹ Protestors sought to force the resignation of the prime minister and other ministers from the ruling family, such as Economy Minister Sheikh Ahmad al Fahad, accused of corruption in awarding \$900 million in government contracts.⁹⁰⁰ Echoing the chants from Cairo's Tahrir Square, the crowd's slogans included the phrase, "The people want to overthrow the head of government," referring to the

⁸⁹⁷ Diwan (2011).

⁸⁹⁸ Tetreault (2012). Looking for Revolution in Kuwait, 3.

⁸⁹⁹ Laessing (2011).

⁹⁰⁰ Tetreault (2012). Looking for Revolution in Kuwait, 5.

country's prime minister.⁹⁰¹ Among the protestors were youth groups and representatives from professional societies who wanted government corruption to be curbed, and "some declared their aspirations for a constitutional monarchy that subscribes to the rule of law".⁹⁰² One young activist, Mohammad al-Hamlan, told the cheering crowd: "The people are the only source of legislation ... The young people are capable of overthrowing the head [of government]".⁹⁰³ A poster read: "Nasser, step down for the sake of Kuwait."⁹⁰⁴ These initial sets of demonstrations were peaceful, without any police violence.

In September 2011, a political corruption scandal erupted involving the transfer of payments or bribes to up to 16 parliament members who supported the government of Sheikh Nasser.⁹⁰⁵ Reports were leaked alleging that two of Kuwait's largest banks had deposited \$92 million into the accounts of two parliament members, as well as further transfers to seven other parliamentarians. These transfers suggested that the government had sought to buy the loyalty of parliamentarians.⁹⁰⁶ The corruption scandal highlighted the fact that the Al-Sabahs' approach to managed reform depended to a large extent on their ability to manipulate members of parliament. Because parliamentary elections do not necessarily provide the government with a natural majority, the regime has always sought to control the increasingly disparate elements within the institution, with varying

⁹⁰¹ Laessing (2011).

⁹⁰² Tetreault (2012). Looking for Revolution in Kuwait, 5.

⁹⁰³ Laessing (2011).

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁵ *BBC News*. (2011). Kuwait's prime minister resigns after protests.

⁹⁰⁶ Katzman (2016).

degrees of success.⁹⁰⁷ It is important to note that the government's ability to manipulate parliament is partly due to the lack of political parties, where even though parliamentary blocs exist, "they lack the discipline and cohesion to organise parliament effectively."⁹⁰⁸ Election candidates can be easily influenced by government bribes, especially if they are dependent solely on local opinion for their re-election, rather than a party platform. The scandal had changed that dynamic, at least for the time being, as well as the complexion, of parliament itself.⁹⁰⁹ It provided the opposition with proof of corruption habits and led thousands of Kuwaiti protestors to the streets on September 21–23, 2011, calling for the resignation of the prime minister. Possibly as a direct response to the allegations, on September 25, 2011 the cabinet adopted an anti-corruption draft law.⁹¹⁰

Nevertheless, hundreds of people continued protesting outside parliament every week, leading eventually to what the Emir described as the "black day"⁹¹¹ in the history of Kuwait: on November 16, 2011, oppositionists in and outside the Assembly, including leading opposition figure Mussalam Al-Barrak and the 'Fifth Fence' youth group, forced their way into the parliament building, demanding the prime minister's resignation.⁹¹² According to media reports, the demonstrators broke open the gates to the parliament building and managed to enter the main chamber, where they sang the national anthem.⁹¹³

⁹⁰⁷ Power (2012), 11.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid, 11.

⁹¹⁰ Katzman (2016).

⁹¹¹ Coles, I. (2011). Kuwait emir slams opposition, says PM will not go. *Reuters*.

⁹¹² Katzman (2016).

⁹¹³ *BBC News*. (2011). Protesters storm Kuwaiti parliament.

The protestors clashed with police, leading to 45 arrests that night.⁹¹⁴ Five security personnel and countless demonstrators were reported as wounded.⁹¹⁵ The protestors were later acquitted on charges relating to the storming of parliament, the defendants having argued that they had no criminal intent but were compelled to protest over alleged corruption.⁹¹⁶ The storming of parliament came a day after the cabinet and parliament voted against a request by opposition parliamentarians to question Sheikh Nasser on allegations of corruption involving the bank deposit scandal.

The Emir denounced the opposition, saying: “What happened was abnormal ... the day when MPs (and dozens of protestors) stormed parliament ... breaking the doors to get into the assembly of which they are members and taking in 150 people: that's what I call a black day.”⁹¹⁷ He further insisted that he would not bow to demands to sack the prime minister or dissolve parliament, and that it was not their right to decide whether he be dismissed: “Dissolving the parliament and the government – these are my powers ... Even if I had the intention to ask him [Sheikh Nasser] to resign, I will not do so under pressure from these people (opposition) ... We are the ones who protect the constitution and they distort it.”⁹¹⁸ Subsequently, on December 4, 2011, Sheikh Nasser finally resigned from his post and the Emir accepted his resignation;⁹¹⁹ in his resignation letter to the Emir, Sheikh Nasser blamed unnamed opposition lawmakers for Kuwait's political

⁹¹⁴ Coles (2011).

⁹¹⁵ Tetreault (2012). Kuwait's Impending Elections: How Did We Get Here? 13.

⁹¹⁶ *BBC News*. (2013). Kuwait protestors cleared over storming of parliament.

⁹¹⁷ Coles (2011).

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹¹⁹ *BBC News*. (2011). Kuwait's prime minister resigns after protests.

instability and the government's inability to perform.⁹²⁰ The corruption scandal played a crucial role in the removal of the prime minister – the Emir was cornered into conceding to popular demands for his removal. State television in Kuwait quoted Sheikh Nasser as saying the decision of the government to step down was “to comply with the national interest and due to the danger the situation had reached”.⁹²¹ After the resignation of Sheikh Nasser, the Emir appointed another member of the royal family in his place, Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. Two days later, the Emir dissolved parliament and called for new elections, which were set for February 2, 2012.

Interestingly, the popular demands for the removal of the prime minister, Sheikh Nasser, may also be based on a seed planted by members of the royal family from the Salem branch who were excluded from key ruling positions (details in Chapter 3).

*Considering the fact that some of the members of the royal family have significant economic, political and social weight, they have begun to wage fierce campaigns against the Prime Minister with the aim of finishing his political career in order to clear path to rule for themselves. This conflict between parties of the royal family is played out in the Kuwaiti parliament, media outlets owned by members of the royal family, and through some Twitter accounts.*⁹²²

Prior to the demonstrations in front of the parliament building in November 2011, official newspaper sources revealed that Sheikh Nasser had prompted members of

⁹²⁰ *IHS Global Insight*. (2011). Kuwaiti Opposition Demands Dissolution of Parliament as Government Falls.

⁹²¹ *BBC News*. (2011). Kuwait's prime minister resigns after protests.

⁹²² Alwahaib (2012).

parliament to summon a member of the royal family, Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahad⁹²³ for questioning, “in order to compromise his political career”.⁹²⁴ The threat of parliamentary inquiry into suspected corruption led Sheikh Ahmad to resign from his government post. Subsequent to Sheikh Ahmad’s resignation, the financial scandal involving the prime minister was revealed in all the major news outlets. The scandal had implicated the prime minister in bribing several parliament members with extensive financial incentives; the scandal was allegedly brought about as a vengeful response by Sheikh Ahmad against the prime minister.⁹²⁵

Nevertheless, overwhelming public anger at the bribery allegations against Sheikh Nasser, and his weakness as head of government, had culminated in demands for his removal. The Emir was adamant in securing Sheikh Nasser’s position to prove his upper hand against the opposition; however, he had to defuse the crisis and contain popular anger, and thus accepted the prime minister’s resignation. An important aspect of the removal of the prime minister is the encouragement and incentive it provided for the youth groups who participated in the demonstrations. “Kuwaiti youth groups buoyed by their success in helping to bring down the previous government and parliament are playing an active role in a general election to achieve their goals for change.”⁹²⁶ The youth groups were emboldened by their power, and thus became more involved in the election campaigns for the next parliament. Islamist candidate and human rights activist, Adel al-Damkhi, commented on the power of the youth activists: “Youths now are more

⁹²³ He is a member of the Salem line, an opposing branch of the Al Sabah family.

⁹²⁴ Alwuhaib (2012).

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

⁹²⁶ *Hurriyet Daily News*. (2012).

powerful than parliament. They have been moving and monitoring mistakes and their reaction will be stronger than anyone can imagine.”⁹²⁷ However, the youth activists insist that their activities are not linked simply to elections, and indicate that they would return to the streets if the next parliament failed to produce comprehensive reforms. A leading activist from the Fifth Fence youth group, Abdullah al-Shallahi, said that his group was actively taking part in the election campaign, and helping around 30 candidates who “accept [their] ideas for comprehensive democratic reform”.⁹²⁸ He further stated: “Our goals go far beyond the election period. We want fundamental reforms including a constitutional monarchy, reforming the election law and legalising political parties.”⁹²⁹

c. Demonstrations for Democratic Reform

After the resignation of the prime minister, demonstrations continued in Kuwait City and were mainly organised by pro-democracy youth activists and Islamist opposition parliament members. While the prime minister’s political opponents primarily based demands for his removal on corruption charges, there was the deeper ambition of advancing the country’s constitutional monarchy. “Having already forced the concession of separating the prime minister position from the office of the crown prince, the opposition now seeks to establish the principle that the prime minister can be dismissed by parliament.”⁹³⁰

⁹²⁷ Ibid.

⁹²⁸ Ibid.

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

⁹³⁰ Diwan (2011).

*Inspired by the Arab Spring events and fed up with stalemated and corrupt politics, Kuwaiti youth, students and members of parliament have increased their concentration on ousting the prime minister. Their goal was to make the prime minister the democratically elected leader of the parliament rather than the Emir's appointed proxy.*⁹³¹

The youth leaders announced they would support parliament deputies who would press for a fully elected government, in which the prime minister is selected by parliament, as well as the legalisation of political parties and changes to election laws. “Such announcements confirmed the fears of the royal family that dissolving the Assembly and holding new election would empower oppositionists sympathetic to the 2011 Arab uprisings.”⁹³² At the start of the election campaign, youth activists launched the “Kuwait Charter 2012”, an internet petition that calls for wide-ranging political and economic reforms. Enthusiastic young speakers became regular guests at evening election rallies, urging voters to elect reformists and to shun pro-government candidates.⁹³³

Ultimately, the elections on February 2, 2012 resulted in a pro-opposition Assembly, with an increase of Islamist (both Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist) representation. Pro-government candidates were defeated for allegedly taking government bribes (the September 2011 scandal), while the liberals lost support.⁹³⁴ The new parliament lifted the immunity of MPs previously accused of corruption so that they could be prosecuted. Furthermore, it made a significant constitutional gain when the new Prime Minister,

⁹³¹ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

⁹³² Katzman (2016).

⁹³³ *Hurriyet Daily News*. (2012).

⁹³⁴ Katzman (2016).

Sheikh Jaber, was questioned by parliament in public for the first time, in March 2012. The Assembly questioned the prime minister on the handling of the corruption scandal linked to the previous government. Since the interpellation occurred so early in the legislative period, it stopped short of calling for a no confidence motion.⁹³⁵ However, the February 2012 parliament faced its end sooner than expected. On June 20, 2012, Kuwait's Constitutional Court ruled that the December 2011 suspension of parliament by the Emir was not conducted in accordance with the constitution on the basis that a new cabinet had not been sworn in before the suspension was ordered. Hence, the court moved to dissolve the elected February 2012 parliament and reinstate the May 2009 Assembly (which consisted of a majority of pro-government members).⁹³⁶

Demonstrations exploded on June 26, 2012, when thousands of Kuwaitis rallied to call for democratic reform, particularly for the formation of a government based on election results.⁹³⁷ It was widely believed that the Emir had aimed to dissolve the opposition-dominated parliament in order to reinstate a more flexible parliament that included more pro-government members.⁹³⁸ The government added further fuel to the flames when it decided to refer the Electoral Law to the Constitutional Court in August due to its suspicion that it contradicted the constitution.⁹³⁹ In 2006, a reformed Electoral Law was passed reducing the number of electoral districts from 25 to five. The law was adopted

⁹³⁵ Westall, S. (2012). Kuwaiti lawmakers quiz new PM over handling of graft probe. *Reuters*.

⁹³⁶ Katzman (2016).

⁹³⁷ *Middle East Online*. (2012). Kuwait opposition rallies ahead of crucial verdict.

⁹³⁸ Kinninmont, J. (2012). Kuwait's Parliament: An Experiment in Semi-democracy. *Middle East and North Africa Programme*, Chatham House.

⁹³⁹ *Gulf News*. (2012). Kuwait opposition accuses government of 'plotting coup.'

after popular rallies were initiated by the Orange Movement. The Information Minister, Sheikh Mohammad, told a press conference that the decision was taken after “all constitutional experts asked by the government said that the law is in breach of the constitution.”⁹⁴⁰ He further stated that the aim was to “immune the law against possible future challenges that many nullify any elections”.⁹⁴¹ However, it was clear that the government had asked the Constitutional Court to rule on legality to further its attempt to dilute the strength of opposition victories in future elections.⁹⁴² In response, opposition members and youth activists met in the office of former parliament speaker, Ahmed Al-Saadoun, one of the opposition leaders, and agreed that the government was instigating a “coup against the constitution”.⁹⁴³ They further accused the government of involving the Constitutional Court in the ongoing political crisis in order to create a “legislative vacuum” leading to its monopoly over the country’s decision-making process. They thus called for the “activation of the constitutional monarchy” with the aim of securing an elected government.⁹⁴⁴

A day before the ruling, on September 24, 2012, “around 10,000 people, who filled the seaside square opposite the parliament building, cheered loudly as opposition figures called for an elected government and warned against what they called a politicized ruling.”⁹⁴⁵ On September 25, the Constitutional Court rejected the government’s request

⁹⁴⁰ *Al-Arabiya*. (2012). Kuwait refers controversial electoral law to court.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid*.

⁹⁴² Westall (2012). Kuwaiti lawmakers quiz new PM over handling of graft probe. *Reuters*.

⁹⁴³ Zaaier, H. (2012). Did Kuwait's Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat to the Regime? *Al-Monitor*.

⁹⁴⁴ *Gulf News*. (2012). Kuwait opposition accuses government of ‘plotting coup.’

⁹⁴⁵ *Middle East Online*. (2012). Kuwait opposition rallies ahead of crucial verdict.

to revise the Electoral law, demonstrating a rare example of the court overruling the Emir's wishes.⁹⁴⁶ The court declared the Electoral Law to be constitutional, clearing the way for new elections based on the five districts.⁹⁴⁷ The government's plan to manipulate a way out of the country's political deadlock by involving the Constitutional Court had failed. The court ruling that rejected the government's case sent a strong message to the opposition: the Constitutional Court is not a biased arm of the executive,⁹⁴⁸ and it solely exists to protect the Kuwaiti constitution, and thereby the citizens' political and social rights. The court ruling also sent an important political message to neighbouring Gulf leaderships: "It reaffirms the judicial independence and the separation of powers in Kuwait", a unique condition that set Kuwait apart from neighbours whose freedoms were more restricted.⁹⁴⁹

On October 19, the Emir set a new election date of December 1, 2012, and simultaneously issued an Emiri decree amending the electoral constituency law to limit voters to the choice of one candidate, in contrast to the previous law of four candidates per district.⁹⁵⁰ "The edict appeared in a special edition of the official gazette *Kuwait al-Yawm* [*Kuwait Today*], making it effective immediately."⁹⁵¹ The Emir explained that his decision to change the voting system was "to preserve national unity",⁹⁵² but he was

⁹⁴⁶ Toumi, H. (2012). Kuwait court upholds 2006 electoral law. *Gulf News*.

⁹⁴⁷ Tetreault (2012). Looking for Revolution in Kuwait, 7.

⁹⁴⁸ Westall (2012).

⁹⁴⁹ Ulrichsen, K. C. (2012). Kuwait's Uncertain Path. *Foreign Policy*.

⁹⁵⁰ Katzman (2016).

⁹⁵¹ Tetreault (2012). Looking for Revolution in Kuwait, 7.

⁹⁵² Bandow, D. (2012). Arab Spring Comes to Kuwait. *Cato Institute*.

criticised for being both unfair and unconstitutional by leading opposition members.⁹⁵³

The opposition believed that this step aimed to manipulate the elections results and produce an “obedient” parliament; and they threatened to boycott the elections.⁹⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the regime rallied support for the Emir’s decision and endorsed a statement signed by a list of Kuwaiti notables that condemned boycotting the election.⁹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, public protests against the revised election ruling ensued, followed by an electoral boycott.⁹⁵⁶

On October 21, 2012, Kuwait experienced its largest demonstration at Erada Square, dubbed the “March of Dignity”, attended by an estimated 100,000–200,000 citizens.⁹⁵⁷ The March of Dignity protest was organised by an anonymous Twitter account that appealed to Kuwaitis to gather “to protect their constitutional and political freedoms against perceived governmental assault”⁹⁵⁸ and declared the wish “to preserve a degree of independence from opposition politicians, whom they suspect of manipulating the protests for their own narrow political interests”.⁹⁵⁹ The anonymity of the organisers had helped create a more inclusive atmosphere surrounding the protests. An activist, Mona Kareem, stated: “Last year people protested against the prime minister in protests that

⁹⁵³ Opposition rally protesting new electoral reform and calling for the boycott of parliamentary elections set for December 1, 2012. Personal Attendance. 11 Nov. 2012. Erada Square (opposite the parliament building), Kuwait.

⁹⁵⁴ Zaaiteer, H. (2012). Did Kuwait's Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat to the Regime? *Al-Monitor*.

⁹⁵⁵ Tetreault (2012). Looking for Revolution in Kuwait, 7.

⁹⁵⁶ Bandow (2012).

⁹⁵⁷ Zaaiteer, H. (2012). Did Kuwait's Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat to the Regime? *Al-Monitor*.

⁹⁵⁸ Patel, K. (2012). Kuwait: Who's afraid of anonymous opposition? *Daily Maverick*.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid.

were organised by the opposition, but the opposition is perceived to be Islamist and extremist, so young, left-wing and secular Kuwaitis did not want to get involved.”⁹⁶⁰ At first, the demonstration was peaceful; however, it became violent when riot police surrounded some groups and used teargas and stun grenades to disperse them.⁹⁶¹ The wounded were estimated at around 100 activists and 11 police officers;⁹⁶² a medical source told Reuters that at least 29 people had been admitted to hospital, most suffering from tear gas inhalation or from baton bruises.⁹⁶³ The Interior Ministry justified the use of force to disperse protestors by saying they “rioted and used violence”, “threw stones at police forces” and “blocked traffic”.⁹⁶⁴ At least 15 people, including two former MPs and a reporter, were detained.⁹⁶⁵ The arrests of parliamentarians and activists led to further demonstrations calling for the release of leading opposition figure, Musallam Al-Barrak, who was arrested for allegedly insulting the Emir during a speech he gave at a previous opposition rally on October 19. Al-Barrak directed a part of his speech to the Emir, saying:

Your Highness, in the name of the nation we shall not allow you to engage in autocratic rule [...] Your Highness, how do you want to go down in history?

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁶¹ Hagagy, A. (2012). Police in Kuwait teargas opposition protesters. *Reuters*.

⁹⁶² Zaaier, H. (2012). Did Kuwait's Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat to the Regime? *Al-Monitor*.

⁹⁶³ Hagagy (2012). Police in Kuwait teargas opposition protesters.

⁹⁶⁴ Patel, K. (2012). Kuwait: Who's afraid of anonymous opposition? *Daily Maverick*.

⁹⁶⁵ Hagagy (2012). Police in Kuwait teargas opposition protesters.

*Do you want it to be recorded that under the rule of Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed, opinion formers [leaders] were imprisoned?*⁹⁶⁶

According to the Kuwaiti constitution, Article 54, the Emir is “immune and inviolable”.⁹⁶⁷ Thus, government authorities arrested Al-Barrak days after the rally, and prosecutors charged him with “encroaching on the pillars of the emirate, insulting the Emir and infringing his authorities”;⁹⁶⁸ he was later sentenced to two years in prison.⁹⁶⁹ Around 21 people, including nine former parliamentarians, were also convicted and given two-year prison terms for repeating his speech in social media and in front of large crowds.⁹⁷⁰ The imprisonment of Al-Barrak was a major attempt by the government to discredit his message and stigmatise him as a threat to national security.

*This was the first such challenge from a Kuwaiti or even Gulf politician against a sitting emir, and went against Kuwaiti law, which dictates that the emir should not be criticised directly or even indirectly. Al-Barak broke an old tradition so openly that it encouraged hundreds of young men and women to follow suit.*⁹⁷¹

On October 31, around 200 of Al-Barrak’s supporters gathered outside the Central Prison where he was held, calling for his release.⁹⁷² Witnesses say that the riot police used

⁹⁶⁶ Amnesty International. (2015). Kuwait: Prisoner of conscience Musallam al-Barrak must be released immediately.

⁹⁶⁷ The Constitution of the State of Kuwait

⁹⁶⁸ Hagagy, A. (2012). Kuwait charges opposition leader with insulting emir. *Reuters*.

⁹⁶⁹ *Kuwait Times*. (2015). Barrak Handed Two Years in Prison for Insulting Emir.

⁹⁷⁰ Amnesty International USA. (2011). Annual Report: Kuwait 2011.

⁹⁷¹ Ghabra (2014).

⁹⁷² *Human Rights Watch*. (2012). Kuwait: Lift Protest Ban.

tear gas and stun grenades to suppress the demonstration.⁹⁷³ The demonstrators also demanded the removal of a recent ban by the government on public gatherings and the royal decree ordering changes to the Electoral Law.⁹⁷⁴ The clash between demonstrators and police was so intense that Kuwaiti authorities allegedly considered bringing troops into the capital to contain the gathering and any future demonstrations.⁹⁷⁵ An unnamed source within law enforcement made a comment to a daily newspaper, *Al-Anbaa*: “The army and national guard may be called in if needed to deal with any breach of public order ... The country’s interior ministry maintains it will use all means necessary to prevent illegal processions.”⁹⁷⁶ Similar threats and defensive language were used by neighbouring Gulf governments in response to their own domestic disturbances during the Arab Spring. Fortunately for the Kuwaiti population, the government did not go to the extreme of engaging its military.

There were some individuals who opposed the opposition and sided with the government and the Emir as to his right to alter the Electoral Law and dispense police force at the March of Dignity demonstration on October 21. A former minister, Sami al-Nusif, commented in *As-Safir* newspaper: “[W]hat happened on [Sunday] was erroneous, without any doubt [in reference to the police using violence]. But the demonstration had no grounds ... The emir has every right to issue an emergency decree in the absence of parliament. He did so about 1,054 times, during one of which the electoral constituencies

⁹⁷³ *News OK*. (2012). Clashes in Kuwait over jailed opposition figure.

⁹⁷⁴ Further restricting public movement, the government announced the enforcement of a ban on gatherings of over 20 people on November 2, 2012.

⁹⁷⁵ *RT International*. (2012). Kuwait may employ troops against opposition.

⁹⁷⁶ *RT International*. (2012). Kuwait may employ troops against opposition.

law was modified.”⁹⁷⁷ He added that one man, one vote allows for the representation of marginalised groups, thus taking democratic procedures into account more than the current Electoral Law. Another government supporter, Hussein Abdul Rahman, a political science professor and specialist in the affairs of the National Assembly, stressed the right of the opposition to demonstrate and boycott elections; however, he did not share their view of the decree as “a coup against the constitution”.⁹⁷⁸

On November 11, 2012, another rally was held at Erada Square. The authorised⁹⁷⁹ rally coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Kuwaiti constitution. It was the first in a series of protests against the voting amendment to take place without police violence.⁹⁸⁰ The rally was peaceful and opposition members delivered speeches highlighting the glory of the Kuwaiti constitution. The participants were a mix of Islamist supporters, tribal groups, youth activists, and former parliament opposition members.⁹⁸¹ Prior to the rally, the Kuwaiti Emir, Sheikh Sabah, had announced that there would be no leniency towards threats to “the security of the homeland”.⁹⁸² He further stated: “Today we are required to choose between the rule of law and the constitution and stick to it, to the road of safety, or to pursue chaos and infringe on the powers of the responsible constitutional

⁹⁷⁷ Zaaiteer, H. (2012). Did Kuwait's Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat to the Regime? *Al-Monitor*.

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁹ Protest marches are illegal in Kuwait without prior approval from the Ministry of Interior. Erada Square in front of the parliament building was allocated by the ministry as an approved area for gatherings (more details under Police Violence section).

⁹⁸⁰ *Al-Akhbar*. (2012). Kuwait opposition rallies outside Parliament.

⁹⁸¹ Opposition Rally. Personal Attendance. 11 Nov. 2012.

⁹⁸² Westall, S. (2012). Kuwait opposition to unite in protest rally on Sunday. *Reuters*.

authorities.”⁹⁸³ He renounced “sedition” and asked citizens to cast their ballots as a national duty.

On December 1, 2012, the opposition boycotted the elections, along with a majority of the Kuwaiti electorate. Despite the opposition’s vehement calls for boycotting the upcoming polls, a total of 387 candidates registered for election.⁹⁸⁴ The voter turnout, however, was 40% among eligible voters. Some opposition figures contested the government’s percentage of voter turnout, and insisted that the turnout was at most 33%.⁹⁸⁵ The boycott led to an overwhelming pro-government Assembly on the strength of the 17 pro-government Shi’a elected, including five Islamist Shi’a of the National Islamic Alliance (NIA). The number of Shi’a elected was the highest of any Assembly to date. On December 5, 2012, the Cabinet of Ministers was formed, and despite repeated demonstrations by the opposition, “the government tried to move forward on long stalled legislation with a solidly supportive Assembly.”⁹⁸⁶

Even though the December 1 elections took place, the Emir’s election decree remained under legal challenge at the Constitutional Court. On June 16, 2013, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Emir’s decree – to reduce four candidates to one – was indeed constitutional, yet it ordered the Assembly to be dissolved on the basis of technicalities and improprieties. The government therefore set new elections, to be held on July 27, 2013. The election produced another pro-government Assembly, yet less reliant on Shi’a

⁹⁸³ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁴ *Gulf News*. (2012). Kuwait rally coincides with statute jubilee.

⁹⁸⁵ Bandow (2012).

⁹⁸⁶ Katzman (2016).

candidates than the previous Assembly (Shi'a-held seats had decreased from fifteen to eight).⁹⁸⁷

Overall, opposition boycotts of parliamentary elections benefited the regime in producing pro-government Assemblies and eliminating the opposition from parliamentary politics. A former MP, Nasser Al-Sane', explained the logic behind the boycotts as an attempt to expose the government as the source of political gridlock. He stated, "the more we stay away, the more we show it's the government that cannot perform." Shafeeq Ghabra further explains: "this parliament realises the problem is the decision-making structure; the problem isn't the street."⁹⁸⁸ The latest election, on July 27, 2013, had produced a pro-government Assembly "more amenable to working with the ruling family, ushering in a period of renewed legislative and governmental action on long-standing issues and an end to most public protest".⁹⁸⁹ However, Kuwait's political crisis is far from resolved. Demands for democratic reform continue, where "most people appear to want more than an improved status quo."⁹⁹⁰ A former MP and leading opposition member, Faisal Al-Muslim, summarised the demands of the opposition as an elected prime minister, fully independent courts, and financial disclosure for government officials and MPs.

The end of the Arab Spring in Kuwait is represented by the end of the cycle of parliamentary dissolutions and the halt of mass demonstrations. Since the July 2013

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁸ Freer, C. (2015). The rise of pragmatic Islamism in Kuwait's post Arab Spring opposition movement. *The Brookings Institution*.

⁹⁸⁹ Katzman, K. (2014). Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy. *CRS Report for Congress*.

⁹⁹⁰ Bandow (2012).

elections, there have been no major public demonstrations. Reasons to the halt of mass demonstrations in Kuwait may rely on a more regional perspective: as the violent unrest in Egypt and Syria tarnished the appeal of revolutionary change and highlighted the dangers of national disunity, the public's tolerance for street protests declined. Protests retreated into Kuwait's more tribal neighbourhoods, and their national appeal began to diminish. Meanwhile, the government began to utilise legal mechanisms to prevent further dissent: "Throughout 2012-2013 reports of protests were replaced by dockets of court hearings as dozens of activists and former politicians faced charges for their street actions or for the ... charge of offending the Emir."⁹⁹¹

Almost two years into the Arab Spring the Kuwaiti leadership was able to fend off demands for reform by allowing opposition figures to speak their mind in parliament, and their supporters to demonstrate in the protest zone at Erada Square, in front of the parliament building.⁹⁹² Although the number of opposition MPs has increased in the past couple of years, the opposition still largely confines its demands to limiting the ruling family's power rather than ending its rule.⁹⁹³ However, the use of harsh policing and restricting freedom of speech has discredited the leadership in the eyes of many Kuwaitis. The following sections examine the details of how the Kuwaiti ruling elite responded to the demonstrations, and highlights the role of the GCC in its survival of the Arab Spring.

⁹⁹¹ Diwan, K. (2014). Breaking Taboos. Youth Activism in the Gulf States. *Atlantic Council*.

⁹⁹² McGeough, P. (2012). Kuwait may write Arab Spring's next chapter. *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

⁹⁹³ Katzman (2013). Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy.

IV. Case Study Analysis: Surviving the Arab Spring

While Kuwait was experiencing its own version of the Arab Spring, its neighbouring GCC states were also facing popular mobilisation among their citizen populations. Mass demonstrations erupted in Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia in 2011, prompting the Gulf states to strengthen their cooperation under their GCC alliance. The hypothesis of this research is that the Gulf monarchies utilised the GCC as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring. The threat of regime change fully engaged the six member states to consolidate their response to street demonstrations and allow unprecedented interference into the domestic affairs of individual members. The hypothesis also indicates a strong correlation between support of the GCC alliance on the one hand, and the Kuwaiti leadership's capacity to maintain its regime status during the Arab Spring on the other.

This research builds its hypothesis on the notion of a broad GCC strategy for regime preservation; arguing that the Gulf leaderships have utilised similar tactics involving the GCC in surviving the Arab Spring. It bases the GCC strategy for regime preservation on the Riyadh Declaration; a document introduced by the Saudi monarchy during the GCC's 32nd summit in Riyadh on December 21, 2011. The declaration was a proposal to explore the transformation of the GCC organisation from cooperation to union.⁹⁹⁴ It marked the beginning of the adoption of a broad strategy for regime preservation by all six members of the GCC. The Riyadh Declaration presented a plan of action that listed several

⁹⁹⁴ *SUSRIS*. (2011).

objectives and policies that ultimately ensured the survival of the Gulf monarchies during the Arab Spring.

From these objectives, this research derived three main tactics: enhancing members' monarchical legitimacy, heightening their internal security, and collaborating in a defence scheme. The Gulf leaderships have utilised these tactics to suppress organised dissent and maintain their hold on power; and the involvement of the GCC alliance is clear within each tactic. The first tactic, of enhancing the leadership's legitimacy, involved the provision of financial incentives for citizens in return for support of the ruler. The second tactic, of heightened internal security, revolves around the various restrictions applied by the ruling elite during the demonstrations, ranging from police brutality to media censorship and arresting key opposition members. The third tactic – collaborating in a defence scheme – highlights the significance of the signing of the GCC Internal Security Agreement in November 2012. As this research will prove in the following sections, the Kuwaiti ruling elite utilised all three tactics in its response to the demonstrations, and ultimately in surviving the Arab Spring.

a. GCC Strategy for Regime Preservation: Enhancing Legitimacy

The tactic of enhancing legitimacy includes the distribution of financial incentives as a way to placate demands for political participation, and the reinvigoration of government-sponsored youth programmes as a way to engage the youth population in the nation's political and economic development. The involvement of the GCC within this tactic is highlighted by the GCC economic package to Oman and Bahrain and its increasing efforts of combining GCC youth programmes within the six member states. Moreover,

the GCC announced its commitment to the aim of interaction with the political, economic, social and security changes and challenges of each member state as laid out in the Riyadh Declaration and reiterated in the Sakhir Declaration in December 2012.⁹⁹⁵ The Kuwaiti leadership certainly engaged in this tactic during the Arab Spring, even prior to the signing of the Riyadh Declaration. Appeasing the population with welfare packages has been an ongoing tactic of regime preservation among all GCC monarchies. In February 2011, the Kuwaiti Emir announced the distribution of cash and free food grants for a year for all citizens, as an attempt to pre-empt any discontent influenced by the events of the Arab Spring in neighbouring countries.⁹⁹⁶ The state further increased civil servant salaries by 115%, costing the nation more than \$1 billion.⁹⁹⁷ The total subsidies would cost the government around \$17.7 billion a year. Analysts assert that if such government benefits continue at their current rates, it would likely put Kuwait's budget into deficit starting from between 2017 and 2020. "Recent Kuwaiti budgets appeared intended to calm or avoid unrest rather than to set Kuwait up for long-term growth."⁹⁹⁸ Consequently, in October 2013, the Prime Minister, Sheikh Jaber, publicly stated that the current subsidies system had produced an "unsustainable" welfare state, and pledged to work to reduce them.⁹⁹⁹

The Saudi, Bahraini, Omani, and Emirati governments had also granted their citizens higher wages and benefits during 2011, indicating a unity in financial decisions and an

⁹⁹⁵ *Gulf News*. (2012). Full Text of the GCC Sakhir Declaration.

⁹⁹⁶ Kholaf (2011). Kuwaitis' Free Food Grant to Cost \$818 Million, KUNA Reports.

⁹⁹⁷ Kamrava (2012), 101.

⁹⁹⁸ Katzman (2014).

⁹⁹⁹ *BBC News*. (2013). Arab uprising: Country by country-Kuwait.

alignment in strategy for regime preservation among GCC members. Even though each Gulf government established its own variety of packages, all six countries found it crucial and expedient to provide financial incentives to their citizens to ensure loyalty, hence creating a *modus operandi* common to all member countries of applying financial leverage to secure their regimes. A collective GCC effort also materialised in the \$20 billion financial assistance package to Bahrain and Oman. The foreign ministers of the GCC states announced an economic package to support the Bahraini and Omani populations by improving their economic and social conditions, creating job opportunities for the unemployed, and overall by raising their standard of living.¹⁰⁰⁰ John Sfakianakis, chief economist with the Riyadh-based Banque Saudi Fransi, commented on the GCC package: “This is a very important message sent to markets inside the region, and globally, that the GCC countries will be unified and will stick together to support those in need. They have the commitment and the willingness to do so, and of course, the money.”¹⁰⁰¹

In the Kuwaiti case, however, financial accommodations were accompanied by reports of corruption among government officials and parliamentarians, leading to thousands of Kuwaiti protestors taking the streets in September 2011 to call for the resignation of the prime minister.¹⁰⁰² The tactic of financial appeasement during the Arab Spring failed and in some ways, perhaps, enticed the Kuwaiti public to protest against government corruption. “The issues of corruption, power struggles and representation recently came

¹⁰⁰⁰ Kholaf (2011). Kuwaitis’ Free Food Grant to Cost \$818 Million, KUNA Reports. *Bloomberg*.

¹⁰⁰¹ El-Tablawy (2011).

¹⁰⁰² Katzman (2014).

together when it became known that the government had deposited millions of Kuwaiti dinars in the bank accounts of some members of parliament.”¹⁰⁰³ These deposits were perceived as bribe money allocated by the prime minister to win parliamentarians’ support in forthcoming votes of no confidence that were expected from the opposition. The scandal galvanised citizens to protest about wider issues, such as corruption, the accountability of government ministers and elected officials and a lack of infrastructure development due to a legislative deadlock.

A main accusation by the protestors was of government interference in parliamentary elections through bribery and vote buying, which dates back to the 1960s. “These undermine parliament’s legitimacy, as MPs are sometimes seen as representing vested interests rather than voters’ interests; the perception of corruption among politicians was one of the main factors driving the protests of 2011.”¹⁰⁰⁴ Furthermore, political disputes between the legislature and the executive had prevented movement on several major projects, such as the Kuwait Development Plan which was approved by parliament in February 2010. It was a five-year plan intended to “turn Kuwait into a regional trade and financial hub for the northern Gulf through economic development, diversification, and GDP growth.”¹⁰⁰⁵ In addition to the plan, Parliament approved a detailed expenditure budget¹⁰⁰⁶ for the period, devising how the government was to spend its resources in order

¹⁰⁰³ Shultziner and Tetreault (2012).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Kinninmont (2012). Kuwait’s Parliament: An Experiment in Semi-democracy.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Hvidt, M. (2013). Economic diversification in GCC countries: Past record and future trends. *Kuwait Programme on Development*, London School of Economics and Political Science.

¹⁰⁰⁶ The budget included total spending of US\$125 billion (*Global Investment House Report 2010*).

to develop the country and, further, to pull Kuwait out of the recession that it had experienced along with the rest of the world since September 2008.¹⁰⁰⁷

However, the structure of the Kuwaiti political system is inclined to encourage political deadlock.¹⁰⁰⁸ The development plan has become a topic of heated debate within parliament, with some parliament members accusing the Cabinet of Ministers of allowing the plan to fall behind schedule.¹⁰⁰⁹ The parliament has the ability to impede government actions “without the responsibility for rule that would come from the formation of the government by parliamentary parties.”¹⁰¹⁰ If the government were to allow the appointment of a commoner prime minister, it would lead to a reliable majority in parliament; as such, it would result in an easing of paralysis in large-scale projects. The developmental plan focused on such projects as had direct and immediate benefit for Kuwaiti citizens (such as the construction of new housing), and might have curtailed the Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011. However, a year after its announcement, it was apparent that the development plan was behind in reaching its goals;¹⁰¹¹ the lack of a strong administration to insist on achieving targets was a key obstruction that ultimately forestalled projects and created more tension between parliament and the government. Hence, political and economic reform became key demands among demonstrators.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Markaz*. (n.d.). Kuwait Development Plan: Opportunities and Uncertainties.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Herb, M. (2009). A Nation of Bureaucrats: Political Participation and Economic Diversification in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. *Int. J. Middle East Stud* 41(3), 375-395.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Oxford Business Group*. (2012). Kuwait: Opportunities in national development plan.

¹⁰¹⁰ Hvidt (2013).

¹⁰¹¹ Al-Tamimi, A. (2014). Kuwait development plan fails to achieve goals. *Al-Monitor*.

i. Engaging with the Youth

In the light of the Arab Spring, the ruling elite are taking Kuwaiti youth and their issues more seriously. At the opening session of parliament on February 15, 2012, the Emir, Sheikh Sabah, called on citizens to “focus on developing and nurturing youth, providing them with job opportunities, respectable living conditions, and galvanising their positive and constructive participation in serving and developing society, as they are our hope.”¹⁰¹²

The Ministry of State for Youth Affairs is the main governmental body responsible for youth in Kuwait. Through the Ministry of Youth Affairs, a government-sponsored youth programme, the National Youth Program, was set up with the aim of engaging the country’s youth in a variety of social and national issues and encouraging them to eventually become leaders.¹⁰¹³ As part of the National Youth Program, a youth council was established, whose role was “to create mechanisms to engage Kuwaiti youth, and to create partnerships between government, civil society and private sector for the benefit of youth development. Recent initiatives include projects to promote volunteerism, entrepreneurship, and to combat communal violence.”¹⁰¹⁴ The council is mandated by the Emir, and made up of representatives from public service organisations, student federations and youth volunteer groups, who were asked to nominate three persons each.

The youth are encouraged to submit recommendations on how to improve the country’s overall performance by capitalising on its human resources, at an annual

¹⁰¹² Abu-Fadil, M. (2012). Abdulaziz Sadeq Spearheads Kuwait's National Youth Project Media Campaign. *The Huffington Post*.

¹⁰¹³ *Ministry Of State For Youth Affairs* (n.d.). Kuwait Youth Index. .

¹⁰¹⁴ *Youth Policy*. (2014). Kuwait Factsheet.

national youth conference. In November 2012, Kuwait held its first conference of the National Youth Project (NYP), a national consultation project where young Kuwaitis were asked to submit policy recommendations concerning young people.¹⁰¹⁵ The result was a National Youth Document that includes recommendations in areas such as citizenship, education, economic development, housing, and health. This document was presented to the Emir and the Council of Ministers for consideration. In March 2014, the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs held a youth forum to discuss the implementation of some of the recommendations, however it is unclear what role the youth council will play in influencing policymaking.¹⁰¹⁶

The Kuwaiti slogan in its National Youth Programme is “Kuwait is listening”, indicating that the government is aware of their troubles and is willing to listen to their proposed solutions.¹⁰¹⁷ The programme allows the youth to voice their opinion, negative or positive, as long as it is in a respectful manner, because their criticisms are seen as constructive rather than destructive. However, some of Kuwait’s youth perceive this government initiative as a ruse to engage youth and make them feel important, while in actuality the government is using the youth to promote its legitimacy. In other words, the ruling elites are enhancing their legitimacy by creating the illusion that they are encouraging the country’s youth and listening to them. These sentiments have been

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁶ KUNA. (2013). Nat'l youth project concluded with honoring ceremony.

¹⁰¹⁷ Abu-Fadil (2012).

expressed by bloggers, and this research drew together some comments made in response to a blogger who wrote about the initiation of the National Youth Program in 2012:¹⁰¹⁸

Face reality, those youth are only a front, a mask, a cover, a packing, a layer... something different you put on something old ... they are not expecting them to voice, they are not expecting them to reflect ... they are only expecting them to lobby. (3azeez says: March 14, 2012)

The government is an expert in creating a facade and nothing more ... There is no improvement. They are doing this just for SHOW.” (Jasim says: March 14, 2012)

This is just another redundant government committee. (Sami says: April 4, 2012)

These sentiments are not shared by all Kuwaiti youth – there were several posts that offered support for the council and optimism as to the function and role of Kuwaiti youth in the future of Kuwait.

Ultimately, the National Youth Programme website¹⁰¹⁹ provides the youth with an outlet to engage with the government, and also presents useful information specifically about youth in Kuwait: statistics, laws concerning youths, representation and more. Whether the government is serious about implementing a youth policy based on the recommendations of the youth programme has yet to be confirmed; in the meantime, the government is continuing its efforts to engage with the youth by setting up casual meetings between government officials and active Kuwaiti youth. An example was on January 22, 2013, when three government ministers met with a group of bloggers at a

¹⁰¹⁸ Makhoul, M. (n.d.). The Kuwait Youth Council. *Twofortyeightam*. [Blog].

¹⁰¹⁹ *Youth Policy*. (2014). Kuwait Factsheet.

coffee shop in Kuwait City. The Education Minister, Nayef al-Hajraf, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Anas al-Saleh, and Sheikh Mohammad al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, a member of the ruling family who is Kuwait's Minister for Cabinet and Municipal Affairs (all three ministers are in their 40s), had set an informal meeting with around 30 Kuwaiti bloggers and online journalists to discuss issues that concern young people. The major newspapers praised the meeting as an attempt to encourage a dialogue between the government and Kuwaiti youth, especially since the youth were more engaged in social media, as opposed to state-run televised speeches made by government officials. "It is a breakthrough from the formal address, filled with courtesies and empty promises, which state departments' offices routinely spew out," columnist Iqbal al-Ahmad wrote.¹⁰²⁰

In its attempt to further enhance its legitimacy and secure its regime, the Kuwaiti monarchy agreed to the Riyadh Declaration during the GCC 32nd summit in Riyadh in December 2011. From among the points agreed upon by the six-member organisation, the GCC states agreed to improve the status of GCC young people, highlighting their importance within Gulf society. The stated aim was "deepening the common belonging of the GCC youths, improving their identity and protecting their gains by intensifying communication, cooperation and convergence among them and employing educational, media, cultural, sports and scout activities for the service of this goal."¹⁰²¹ The Arab Spring had prompted the GCC leaders to redirect their efforts in invigorating various individual youth programmes sponsored by the state. Most youth programmes in the Gulf

¹⁰²⁰ Westall, S. (2013). Kuwait making tentative steps to connect with youth. *Reuters*.

¹⁰²¹ *SUSRIS*. (2011).

region focus on entrepreneurship projects, such as the Omani SANAD Program¹⁰²² and Bahrain's Tamkeen programme.¹⁰²³ The Saudi government also partnered with the UNDP to develop its own National Youth Strategy.¹⁰²⁴ The establishment of these programmes and the increased efforts in engaging the youth population among GCC states is a tactic designed to enhance the monarchs' legitimacy, but this research also recognises it as a genuine attempt to mobilise the Gulf youth in national projects in order to develop their skills in leadership and other areas. Either way, the involvement of young people in all areas of government must surely have a benefit in terms of increasing their national loyalty and patriotism.

Given the fact that the youth and the unemployed were the prime instigators of the Arab Spring demonstrations throughout the Gulf countries, the GCC organisation has taken steps to establish a committee to study and identify various youth activities and the issues most important to them. In the 33rd GCC Summit in Bahrain in December 2012, the Supreme Council showed its interest in the aspirations of GCC youth by ratifying the views of the consultative body pertaining to youth strategy: "boosting ... the spirit of citizenship, the strategy of employment in the GCC states in the governmental and private sectors and referring these views to the relevant ministerial committees in order to

¹⁰²² *Omanuna Portal*. (2016). Sanad: Self-employment program.

¹⁰²³ *Tamkeen*. (2016). Tamkeen: Bahrain.

¹⁰²⁴ *UNDP in Saudi Arabia*. (2016). Support to Developing the National Youth Strategy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

set up implementation mechanisms for this purpose.”¹⁰²⁵ The Supreme Council has further stated its intention to establish a process of joint cooperation in youth programmes throughout the Gulf region. The GCC Secretary-General, Abdullatif Al-Zayani, launched a conference the following year, in November 2013, entitled “Youth in Council Cooperation: Increasing Growth”,¹⁰²⁶ where he declared the importance of Gulf youth in the context of collaboration of the Gulf countries within the GCC. The GCC Youth Conference invited a large number of selected youth leaders from the Gulf states, as well as several researchers and experts, in order to discuss the transformation of the Gulf Cooperation Council from cooperation to a union. The Gulf youth were encouraged to present recommendations on implementing the initiative by the Saudi leadership in December 2011 calling for the transformation of the GCC into a union.¹⁰²⁷

*The initiatives represent the aspirations of the people of the Gulf and their demands for strategic plans that would support among others their educational and scientific needs required by the Gulf markets to guarantee them jobs ... The union will work to increase employment opportunities for young people of the GCC and ease movement of people between the countries.*¹⁰²⁸

One of the recommendations was aimed at securing the transition of the GCC from a state of cooperation to a state of union by building a strong defensive entity, able to meet all external threats. Participants also urged the need for each state to strengthen its

¹⁰²⁵ *Gulf News*. (2012). Full Text of the GCC Sakhir Declaration.

¹⁰²⁶ Estimo, R. (2013). Youth top priority for GCC nations, says Al-Zayani. *Arab News*.

¹⁰²⁷ *Arab News*. (2012). Youth meet suggests a strong GCC union.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid.

existing political systems and create new institutions to consolidate the federal process itself and increase political participation.

As each GCC member state has established forums for youth affairs within their interior ministries, a collective GCC measure enhancing youth aspirations is not far from becoming a reality. The engagement of youth on an individual and collective level is a strategy which enhances the Gulf leaderships' legitimacy. By stressing the importance of youth in the development of their nations, the Gulf leaderships are attempting to instill a sense of patriotism that ensures loyalty to their monarchical regimes. Hence, this research asserts that since all GCC members have declared their interest in engaging their youth populations individually and collectively, this tactic is considered to have been a key attempt to enhance monarchical legitimacy during the Arab Spring. Whether the tactic has been successful or not, the government is certainly attempting to engage the voice of Kuwaiti youth and provide them with better economic opportunities. However, the government's coercive tactics during the Arab Spring, including police violence and restriction of the freedom of speech, have also ostracised Kuwaiti youth.

b. GCC Strategy for Regime Preservation: Heightening Internal Security

The second tactic, of heightening internal security, concerned the various restrictions applied by the Kuwaiti leadership on its population during the Arab Spring. Ranging from police violence to media censorship and arrests, the leadership tightened its internal security policies and restricted the country's freedom of expression. This research highlights three main government actions under this tactic: excessive force by police during peaceful demonstrations, restrictions on freedom of expression through systematic

legal harassment of activists, journalists, bloggers and political opponents; and the emergence of the practice of revocation of citizenship as a method of punishing any criticism of the government.¹⁰²⁹ Kuwait is obligated to protect rights to freedom of opinion and expression based on Article 36 in the Kuwaiti constitution; however, it has violated its obligations under the constitution, as well as under international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it signed in 1996.¹⁰³⁰ Following the Arab Spring in 2011, the government prosecuted people for criticising the government or its institutions, insulting the Emir, insulting Saudi Arabia or its ruling family, insulting the UAE leadership, and insulting religion.

“Judicial harassment of activists, journalists, bloggers and political opponents continued and was made possible thanks to a myriad of laws criminalising the right to freedom of expression.”¹⁰³¹ The Kuwaiti government’s restrictions are thus enforced by invoking provisions of the constitution and penal code. A new media law imposes severe penalties on people “who create or send immoral messages”.¹⁰³² Another law was introduced in 2013, the National Unity Law, which criminalises publishing and broadcasting content that could be deemed offensive to religious sects or groups, or misusing mobile phones to disseminate objectionable comments.¹⁰³³ These new laws present the Kuwaiti leadership with legal mechanisms to suppress citizens’ constitutional

¹⁰²⁹ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

¹⁰³⁰ *United Nations Treaties Collection*. (1966). Human Rights: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

¹⁰³¹ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

¹⁰³² *Human Rights Watch*. (2015). Kuwait: Crackdown on Free Speech.

¹⁰³³ *BBC News*. (2013). Kuwait Twitter 'insult' prison sentence condemned.

rights of freedom of expression and counter the opposition's attempt to limit authoritarian rule.¹⁰³⁴

Kuwait's crackdown on freedom of expression involved indicting people due to their criticism of GCC leaderships; during 2012 and 2013, Kuwaiti authorities convicted several citizens for insulting the leaderships and policies of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE.¹⁰³⁵ Another new practice by the Kuwaiti authorities was the revoking of citizenship, mainly from political and human rights activists, as a method of repression; a practice that its neighbours – notably the UAE and Bahrain – have used since 2012 to suppress all forms of political opposition. In 2014, the Kuwaiti authorities revoked the citizenship of 33 individuals. They utilised the 1959 Law on Nationality, where Article 13 provides for the withdrawal of nationality by decree of the Interior Ministry if a person “has promoted principles that will undermine the social or economic system of the country, belongs to a foreign political party” or “threatens the higher interests of the State or its security.”¹⁰³⁶ Additionally, decisions to revoke citizenship cannot be appealed legally or administratively because there is no competent body to assess questions of nationality.

The Kuwaiti National Assembly was a key collaborator in the passing of new laws that enabled the Kuwaiti authorities to enforce these restrictions on freedom of expression. On 14 June 2014, a meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers was held to discuss

¹⁰³⁴ Tetreault, M. (2013). Dissent and Citizens' Rights in Kuwait (Part One): The Limits of Electoral Democracy. *Jadaliyya*.

¹⁰³⁵ *BBC News*. (2013). Kuwait Twitter 'insult' prison sentence condemned; *Human Rights Watch*. (2015). Kuwait: Ex-Lawmaker Held After Critical Tweets; *Human Rights Watch*. (2015). Kuwait: Blogger Loses Appeal of 6-Year Sentence.

¹⁰³⁶ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

the recent protests in the country. The Cabinet ordered relevant ministries to take all necessary measures to fight actions that “undermine the country’s security and stability, bringing harm to its institutions.”¹⁰³⁷ It notably called upon, firstly, the Interior Ministry to ensure that the conditions of citizenship are met, especially those related to practices that aim to harm the country’s stability; secondly, it called upon the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour to confront all organisations whose objectives lie outside the scope set by the Law on Societies, reminding them of their role to raise public awareness through non-political activities and to abstain from inciting riots; and thirdly, all media outlets were reminded of the patriotic role that they ought to fulfil in denouncing acts of rioting.¹⁰³⁸ Following this decree, the Interior Ministry ordered the revocation of citizenship of several political opponents (more on this later in the section).

i. Police Violence

This research highlights the government’s use of police violence in several demonstrations carried out by various groups in Kuwait during the Arab Spring. Police violence includes the use of various instruments such as armoured vehicles, tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons and smoke bombs; it also implies the use of force through beatings and arrests. Kuwait’s government has made clear that it is willing and able to suppress unauthorised street protests, and justifies police violence by asserting its duty to protect public safety. It is important to note that while the Kuwaiti authorities utilised police violence in several protests, they also allowed for peaceful demonstrations to occur

¹⁰³⁷ Quote from unofficial translation of June 14, 2014 Cabinet meeting to discuss demonstrations in Kuwait. In *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: 5 Critics Stripped of Citizenship

¹⁰³⁸ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

(see graph below). Protest marches are illegal in Kuwait without prior approval from the Ministry of Interior. Erada Square in front of the parliament building was allocated by the Ministry as an approved area for gatherings. The Ministry of Information states:

“Citizens are entitled to demonstrate in the square next to parliament or by application to the district governor. Those that wish to protest have the right to do so, but they have to be aware of both their rights and responsibilities under the law.”¹⁰³⁹ However, the issue of licences for protests is just a formality introduced by the Kuwaiti government; the real reason for the crackdown is to maintain the stability of the regime, and control the tone of the demonstrations.

This research argues that through its use of police violence, the Kuwaiti government risked provoking further dissent by taking a hard line. Political analysts claim that the Kuwaiti government did not want political turbulence to escalate as it had in neighbouring GCC country Bahrain, where the monarchy had requested the deployment of the GCC Peninsula Shield Force to suppress its own protests in March 2011. However, tensions between the Kuwaiti government and the broad-based opposition increased at the height of the Arab Spring demonstrations in Kuwait in October 2012. In an emailed statement to Reuters, the Ministry of Information wrote: “We are no strangers to open and frank debate amongst our people ... That said, the primary duty of any state is to maintain the safety and security of its citizens; as such, the police and other security forces will be used as necessary to maintain law and order exactly as they were last night [referring to the Nov. 4 protest; see chart below].”¹⁰⁴⁰

¹⁰³⁹ *Gulf News*. (2012). Kuwait rally coincides with statute jubilee.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Westall, S. (2012). Kuwait takes hard line on unauthorized protests. *Reuters*.

The Kuwaiti government has more readily enforced the ban on unlicensed protests since the March of Dignity demonstration on October 21, 2012, where protestors marched in Kuwait City demanding protection of the constitution among other things. A Gulf research specialist, Kristian Ulrichsen, commented on the government's reaction to these protests: "The events of the past two weeks have crossed so many red lines and we now are seeing acts of mass civil disobedience as tens of thousands of people defy government warnings... Each protest is a further challenge, so the authorities are trying to stop them from taking place."¹⁰⁴¹

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid.

Table 8: Kuwaiti authorities' use of police violence on Arab Spring demonstrations (2010–2012)

No.	Date	Demonstration calling for...	Location	Police violence (Yes/No)
1	Dec. 8, 2010	Democratic reform	Private residence	Yes
2	Feb. 18, 2011	Bidoon rights	Taima', Sulaibiyya, and Ahmedi	Yes
3	March 11, 2011	Bidoon rights	Jahra; 50km west of the capital	Yes
4	June 3, 2011	Removal of the prime minister	Erada Square	No
5	Sep. 21-23, 2011	Removal of the prime minister	Erada Square	No
6	Nov. 16, 2011	Removal of the prime minister	Parliament building	Yes
7	Dec. 23, 2011	Bidoon rights	Taima'; Jahra	Yes
8	June 26, 2012	Democratic reform	Erada Square	No
9	Sep. 24, 2012	Democratic reform	Erada Square	No
10	Oct. 15, 2012	Democratic reform	Erada Square (preceded by a march)	Yes
11	Oct. 21, 2012	Democratic reform; dubbed 'March of Dignity'	March through Kuwait City	Yes
12	Oct. 31, 2012	Release opposition member from prison	The square facing the Central Prison in the al-Salibiya region.	Yes
13	Nov. 4, 2012	Democratic reform	Mishref; 20km from the capital.	Yes
14	Nov. 11, 2012	Democratic reform	Erada Square	No
15	Nov. 30, 2012	Boycott the elections	March through Kuwait City	No
16	Dec. 4-6, 2012	Dissolve newly elected Assembly	Various areas around Kuwait	Yes
17	Dec. 8, 2012	Dissolve newly elected Assembly	March through Kuwait City	No
18	Dec. 15, 2012	Dissolve newly elected Assembly	Overnight Sit-in at Erada Square	No

As the chart above shows, during the Arab Spring the Kuwaiti government gave permits to certain demonstrations and allowed several peaceful protests to take place. For example, on November 11, 2012, at least 50,000 supporters of the Kuwaiti opposition were allowed to rally in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the constitution and demand the repeal of a disputed Electoral Law. Even as the crowd began chanting, “The people want the repeal of the law,” the protest remained peaceful.¹⁰⁴² However, the chart also shows that the government utilised police violence in most of the demonstrations, where a large number of citizens were arrested and detained throughout 2011 and 2012. On October 26, 2012, Amnesty International issued a public statement calling on the Kuwaiti government to respect the right to peaceful assembly, in accordance with Kuwait’s obligations under international law and its own constitutional provisions (under Article 44). “Amnesty International is ... concerned that increasing restrictions on freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression in Kuwait, including the rising frequency with which riot police have used unlawful force in response to peaceful demonstrations, signal a disturbing trend in the country.”¹⁰⁴³ The Prime Minister, Sheikh Jaber, assured the organisation that the authorities would uphold the right of protestors to peacefully assemble, although he emphasised that while the government allows demonstrations to take place, it does not allow demonstrators to undertake marches. However, Amnesty pointed out that both gatherings and marches are permitted under Article 44 of the Kuwaiti constitution.¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰⁴² *Your Middle East*. (2012). Kuwaiti opposition rallies over disputed law.

¹⁰⁴³ *Amnesty International*. (n.d.). Kuwait: Annual Report 2015/2016.

¹⁰⁴⁴ The Kuwaiti Constitution.

On November 1, 2012, opposition forces gathered at a meeting house of former MP Waleed al-Tabtabai, where they issued a statement calling for “an end to the unprecedented repressive security practices, the release of all detainees and an end to all security prosecutions of dissidents and young people participating in peaceful protests”.¹⁰⁴⁵

The statement was signed by opposition groups including the ICM, the Salafist bloc, a few youth movements, the National Union of Workers and Employees of Kuwait (a trade union), and independent opposition figures and former parliamentarians. The statement denounced the unlawful use of force by riot police and accused the government of seeking to abolish the constitution and the electoral system in Kuwait. It further described the government’s violent actions as an attempt to turn Kuwait into a police state:

*Security forces are storming into houses, terrorizing people in their own residential areas, and using smoke bombs and tear gas in houses and meeting houses. Many people — mostly youth — were wounded and arbitrarily arrested, and are constantly being tracked down. This is the authorities’ new approach, which is threatening to turn Kuwait into a police state where there is no freedom, constitutional guarantees are violated, people’s dignity is violated, and where tyranny and corruption prevail.*¹⁰⁴⁶

Additional comments by former parliamentarians included warnings to the government of the consequences of its excessive use of force. Former MP Mubarak al-Waalan said: “We condemn the beatings that took place after the withdrawal of the

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Al-Monitor*. (2012). Opposition Figure Released, Protests to Resume in Kuwait.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

peaceful rally and the attack — perpetrated by the Ministry of the Interior — against unarmed youth following their withdrawal [referring to the Oct. 15 demonstration at Erada Square, where eyewitness said that riot police attacked youths as they were heading back to their vehicles to leave].”¹⁰⁴⁷ Meanwhile, former MP Riad al-Adsani noted that “the government still has a chance to tackle the problem wisely before it exacerbates, rather than resort to violence, the consequences of which will result in the loss of all parties”.¹⁰⁴⁸

In response to the statement by the opposition, the Ministry of Interior “expressed surprise over the insistence of demonstrators and those inciting them to hold unlicensed and legally prohibited street marches”.¹⁰⁴⁹ Referring to the ban on gatherings that was issued on November 2, 2012, the Ministry accused the demonstrators of ignoring the law and attacking security agents. The Ministry finally expressed its intention to take pre-emptive measures against such violations “in a firm and severe manner, to prevent compromising the security and safety of the homeland and citizens, and to preserve public and private facilities and properties and the higher homeland security interests during this period”.¹⁰⁵⁰

Overall, the Kuwaiti government’s use of police violence on peaceful demonstrations has backfired; the arrests and beatings of well-known opposition members served only to fuel public outrage and tarnished Kuwait’s rather liberal reputation as the most politically

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ibid.

progressive of the GCC states.¹⁰⁵¹ This research argues that this tactic represents a desperate attempt by the Kuwaiti regime to suppress discontent among its population during the turbulent events of the region.¹⁰⁵²

ii. Restricting the Freedom of Expression

In another effort to tighten its grip on internal security, the Kuwaiti government began making arrests in response to tweets and other social media output. In Kuwait's penal code, Article 25 provides for up to five years in prison for "objecting to the rights and authorities of the Emir or faulting him"; the government had made increased use of this provision during the Arab Spring.¹⁰⁵³ In 2013, an HRW report disclosed that at least 29 Kuwaitis had been charged with faulting the Emir or the government on social media platforms.¹⁰⁵⁴ Five people charged with faulting the Emir were acquitted in February 2013; and an appeal court overturned the conviction of three former Assembly deputies in July 2013 on the same charge. The court also upheld a 20-month sentence on an ordinary female citizen, Sarah al-Darees, for Twitter messages that 'tarnished the Emir's authority'.¹⁰⁵⁵ Historically, Kuwait's freedom of expression is a shining example of its liberal practices among its Gulf neighbours. Kuwait's constitution protects the right to freedom of expression in Article 36: "Every person shall have the right to express and

¹⁰⁵¹ Katzman (2014).

¹⁰⁵² The Arab Spring mass demonstrations in Egypt, Tunis, Libya, etc.

¹⁰⁵³ Katzman (2014).

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). World Report 2014: Kuwait-Events of 2013.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Katzman (2014).

propagate his opinion verbally, in writing or otherwise, in accordance with the conditions and procedures specified by law.”¹⁰⁵⁶

Freedom of the press, printing and publishing are also protected under Article 37 of the constitution. In 1996, Kuwait had also ratified the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights;¹⁰⁵⁷ Bahrain and Kuwait were the only two GCC members who ratified the treaty. Article 19 of the Covenant protects an individual’s right to freedom of expression, including “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”¹⁰⁵⁸ These freedoms are often limited at times of political turbulence; indeed, the Kuwaiti government has used its authority to hamper the freedom of the media in the past. However, sentencing citizens based on their participation and actions within social media is a new practice that surprised and angered many Kuwaiti citizens that honour and value their constitutional freedoms.

A new telecommunications law, the Unified Media law, restricts and regulates citizens’ activities in telecommunications technology, including social media. On May 18, 2014, the National Assembly passed the Unified Media Law by an overwhelming majority. The law comprises 93 articles and establishes a Commission for Mass Communications and Information Technology (CMCIT) to oversee all technical matters pertaining to mobile phone services and internet providers, under the direction of the Ministry of Communications. The CMCIT will also be tasked with monitoring social

¹⁰⁵⁶ The Kuwaiti Constitution.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1996.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *United Nations Treaties Collection*. (1966).

media content. The Ministry of Communications commented to reporters that the sole purpose of the new law was ‘regulatory’ and that it would include tasks like granting licences and monitoring prices, not suppressing freedoms. The “... blocking [of] websites or eavesdropping on phone calls would not happen without a legal order or the word of the public prosecutor.”¹⁰⁵⁹ However, HRW found that Article 70 of the law allows Kuwaiti authorities to imprison people for using “any means of communication to threaten, insult ... or harm the reputation of others”.¹⁰⁶⁰ Article 53 further allows Kuwaiti authorities to suspend mobile services for “national security” reasons.¹⁰⁶¹ The deputy director of the HRW in the Middle East and North Africa states: “This new law comes at a time when Kuwait is prosecuting many activists, politicians, journalists, and other government critics on expansive interpretations of morality and national security. It appears designed to give prosecuting authorities even wider legal authorization for violating Kuwaitis' right to free speech.”¹⁰⁶²

A Kuwaiti human rights activist, Nawaf Al-Hendel, commented on the law to a news source:

Kuwait is forging ahead with a law that will regulate the country's telecommunications and information technology, including social media, despite claims by human rights activists that the bill will restrict freedom of expression. The law allows authorities to block websites, terminate mobile lines for security

¹⁰⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch. (2014). Kuwait: Telecom Law Violates Free Speech.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶² Ibid.

*reasons without a legal order, and issue warrants to search houses without a prior legal order.*¹⁰⁶³

He was also concerned with the ambiguity in the wording of the stated law, stressing that the government must outline the conditions and guidelines under which websites are to be blocked.

On October 21, 2013, the Kuwaiti Emir issued an emergency decree and authorised the National Unity Law. The law criminalises publishing and broadcasting content that could be deemed offensive to religious “sects” or groups and expands existing law by explicitly including social media.¹⁰⁶⁴ This law further restricts freedom of expression and assembly. It provides for prison sentences lasting from one to seven years and a fine of a minimum of 3,000 dinars (approximately 8,200 Euros) for individuals convicted of flouting national unity, such as when media organisations are disrespectful of religious minorities, incite religious hatred or fail to respect the privacy of individuals. Moreover this law, according to the official Kuwaiti press agency “bans any call or manifestation intended to promote hatred or any form of discrimination”,¹⁰⁶⁵ which leaves it open to a broad interpretation by authorities who may use it to silence peaceful criticism of government policies.

Overall, the Kuwaiti government had put these new restrictions in place in order to quell public dissent and raise the fears of citizens that their actions may be treated by law as a threat to national security. The case of a young Kuwaiti Shi’a, Hamad al-Naqi,

¹⁰⁶³ Kholaf, D. (2014). Kuwait Activists Decry Social Media Curbs. *Al-Jazeera*.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *US Department of State*. (2013). 2012 Report on International Religious Freedoms: Kuwait. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

highlights the restrictions placed by these new laws in Kuwait. Al-Naqi was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2012 when the court found him guilty of insulting Islam and the Sunni monarchies of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia through his posts on Twitter.¹⁰⁶⁶ The court “found al-Naqi guilty of insulting the rulers of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, of provoking sectarian tensions, of insulting the Prophet Muhammad and the Prophet’s wife and companions, mocking Islam, and misusing his mobile phone to disseminate the objectionable comments”.¹⁰⁶⁷ According to his lawyer, Al-Naqi’s tweet about the Prophet had violated article 111 of Kuwait’s Penal Code, which decrees that the mocking of religion is punishable by a maximum of one year in prison. His lawyer further states that al-Naqi’s multiple tweets criticising the Saudi and Bahraini monarchies violated the National Security Law’s Article 15, which requires a minimum three-year prison sentence for intentionally broadcasting statements or false rumours that harm the national interests of the state. Al-Naqi’s case is a prime example of GCC influence in Kuwait’s domestic affairs: “His case highlights a growing conservative influence in Kuwait, including crackdowns on online dissent and the deepening cooperation among the Arab Gulf nations.”¹⁰⁶⁸

Since December 2014, the Kuwaiti authorities have further charged at least five people with insulting Saudi Arabia or its ruling family. The Kuwaiti authorities imposed a six-year sentence on blogger, Saleh al-Saeed, on June 12, 2015 for several tweets criticising Saudi Arabia. On October 2014, al-Saeed “posted 16 tweets that accused Saudi Arabia of

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Human Rights Watch*. (2012). Kuwait: 10 Years for Criticizing Neighboring Rulers.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ehrlich, R. (2013) Twitter Prisons for Tweeting in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. *Scoop News*.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

carrying out land grabs in the neutral zone between it and Kuwait to exploit the area's oil reserves, and criticised the Kuwaiti authorities for failing to speak out".¹⁰⁶⁹ According to his lawyer, the Kuwaiti authorities charged al-Saeed after the Saudi Embassy in Kuwait City complained to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs and demanded his prosecution. On December 30, a court convicted al-Saeed under Article 4 of the country's 1970 National Security Law, which makes it a criminal offence to commit a hostile act against a foreign country that disrupts Kuwait's political relations with that country or exposes Kuwait to a risk of war. Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at HRW stated: "In the past, Kuwait stood out as a country that respected free speech, but the tide has turned. Kuwait now clearly would rather curry favour with its neighbours than uphold the rights of its own citizens."¹⁰⁷⁰

In August 2015, a former MP, Abdulhamid Dashti, was charged with targeting Saudi Arabia and "becoming involved in antagonistic activities through statements and tweets that put Kuwait's relations with its neighbour at risk."¹⁰⁷¹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had filed two cases against Dashti after it received complaints from the Saudi Embassy in Kuwait in which "it expressed deep dismay over Dashti's attitude".¹⁰⁷² According to reports, the public prosecutor wanted to question Dashti in the first case over the tweets he posted against Saudi Arabia, and in the second case, wanted answers regarding the anti-Saudi Arabia statements he made during a television interview.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Human Rights Watch*. (2015). Kuwait: Blogger Loses Appeal of 6-Year Sentence.

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁷¹ Toumi, H. (2015). Kuwaiti Lawmaker's Trial to Begin on August 20. *Gulf News*.

¹⁰⁷² *Ibid*.

In December 2014, the Kuwaiti parliament speaker, Marzoug al-Ghanim, announced that parliament had started legal proceedings against “those who offended the UAE leadership” in a TV show broadcast on the legislature’s official television channel. On the TV show, Mubarak al-Duwailah, a former MP, criticised the UAE and its leaders over its policy, which designated the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliate groups as terrorist organisations.¹⁰⁷³ The Kuwaiti authorities also arrested two members of the Al-Sabah ruling family for tweets deemed critical of the government and supportive of the opposition. Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Sabah and Sheikh Nawaf Malek Al-Sabah were arrested for expressing political views on Twitter. The two young royals had written tweets sympathetic to the Kuwaiti opposition during its boycott of the December 1 elections.¹⁰⁷⁴ These charges against members of the ruling family and former MPs, as well as ordinary citizens, highlight the extent to which the government is prepared to go in order to suppress dissent. The new laws were established after the end of the Arab Spring demonstrations in December 2012; suggesting a precautionary measure by the government to warn its citizens that it would take a hard line in response to any further dissent.

iii. Revoking Citizenship

The Law of Nationality¹⁰⁷⁵ empowers the Kuwaiti authorities to strip individuals and their dependents of their Kuwaiti citizenship on several grounds, including if it “involves the

¹⁰⁷³ *Human Rights Watch*. (2015). Kuwait: Ex-lawmaker held after critical tweets.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *The Telegraph*. (2012). Kuwaiti royals arrested for critical government tweets.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Articles 11 and 13 of the Nationality Law of 1959. In *Refworld*. (n.d.). Kuwait Nationality Law of 1959.

higher interests of the state or its foreign security”, or the authorities consider that the individual has “promoted principles that will undermine the social or economic system of the country.”¹⁰⁷⁶ Furthermore, revocation decisions are not subject to any judicial or administrative appeals process. The practice of revoking citizenship was used for the first time in Kuwait as a method of repression, notably against political and human rights activists.¹⁰⁷⁷ As a consequence of the Arab Spring, there were a total of 33 revocations during 2014, of which three are thought to have been for political reasons.¹⁰⁷⁸ The withdrawal of Kuwaiti citizenship violates several principles of international human rights law, and constitutes a new form of reprisal against all forms of criticism of the government.¹⁰⁷⁹ An HRW official, Joe Stork, commented on the issue: “No government has the right to strip away its people’s citizenship simply because it disapproves of them, their opinions, or their actions ... This is yet another downward step in Kuwait’s assault on the right to free speech.”¹⁰⁸⁰

On July 21, 2014, a parliamentary decree ordered the revocation of citizenship of five individuals, including Ahmad Al-Shammari (his four children were also left without nationality).¹⁰⁸¹ Al-Shammari was one of five people whose citizenship was revoked in the first batch of cases, but only his case was based on undermining the social or economic system. He is the owner of two media outlets, the independent *Al-*

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: Government Critics Stripped of Citizenship.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: Government Critics Stripped of Citizenship.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: 5 Critics Stripped of Citizenship.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Al-Karama Foundation*. (2013).

Yom television station and the *Al-Yom* daily newspaper. In May and June, Kuwait's information minister temporarily closed both outlets after they defied a prosecutor-ordered media blackout about an investigation into an alleged plot by senior government officials to overthrow the government.¹⁰⁸² Al-Shammari claims that the government is utilising the revocation of citizenship as a political tool: "I think the authorities want to send a signal to instil fear into those who express their rights of expression. They are using citizenship as a political tool, not a legal status."¹⁰⁸³

The second batch of revocations on September 29 included Saad Al-Ajmi, a former Information Minister, spokesperson for the parliamentary bloc, the Popular Action movement, and professor at Kuwait University.¹⁰⁸⁴ His citizenship was revoked for an article he published in 2012 about alleged government corruption, under Article 11 of the Nationality law, which allows withdrawing citizenship from anyone naturalised by another country. Observers said the measures target naturalised Kuwaitis who have joined the opposition.¹⁰⁸⁵ A Kuwaiti security source said Al-Ajmi was sent to Saudi Arabia after his documents showed he was a native Saudi national. The Kuwait Democratic Forum claimed that his deportation showed a "constitutionally unacceptable approach" by the government in targeting political activists. Al-Ajmi commented that stripping him of his citizenship was part of a government crackdown on political activists deemed by the state to be endangering its stability.¹⁰⁸⁶

¹⁰⁸² *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: Government Critics Stripped of Citizenship.

¹⁰⁸³ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: 5 Critics Stripped of Citizenship.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Mail Online*. (2015). Kuwait jails ex-minister over article criticizing government.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Middle East Monitor*. (2013). Kuwait withdraws citizenship from opposition members.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Reuters*. (2015). Kuwait deports political activist to Saudi Arabia.

In December 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon issued an authoritative report setting out criteria for determining the lawfulness of any country's decision to revoke the citizenship of one of its nationals. The report accepted revocation as legitimate for "rendering of services to a foreign government or military force" or committing acts "seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of the State".¹⁰⁸⁷ The report concluded, however, that revoking a citizen's nationality for exercising the right to freedom of speech amounts to a violation of human rights guaranteed under international law. Following the UN report, HRW called on Kuwaiti authorities to "immediately stop stripping nationals of their citizenship because they exercise free speech or other legitimate human rights, and reinstate the citizenship of people whose citizenship has been withdrawn on those grounds".¹⁰⁸⁸ The statement further called on the authorities to amend the law concerning revocation of citizenship to ensure that the grounds are narrowly defined, the decision to revoke will be proportionate, and that those affected have the right to an independent review. An HRW official, Nadim Houry, stated: "The Kuwaiti authorities seem to think they can use the cover of the nationality law to target their critics and deter dissent ... But Kuwait's real message of official intimidation has rung out loud and clear."¹⁰⁸⁹

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: Government Critics Stripped of Citizenship.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Middle East Monitor*. (2014). HRW warns Kuwait about using nationality law to target opponents.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). Kuwait: Government Critics Stripped of Citizenship.

c. GCC Strategy for Regime Preservation: Collaborating in a Defence Scheme

The third tactic under the GCC strategy for regime preservation is engaging in a collaborative defence scheme. The demonstrations of the Arab Spring have prompted the Gulf monarchies to strengthen their Gulf unity and increase their attempts at GCC integration, mainly in areas of internal security. The Riyadh Declaration in December 2011 provided the momentum for closer integration efforts; it called for efforts to explore a “single unity” that could deal with the many challenges facing the GCC states, and highlighted the types of action that the GCC intended to take towards achieving “unity”.¹⁰⁹⁰ These included building a common defence system and intensifying cooperation between intelligence services. The idea of a joint army had already been tested with the intervention of the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) in Bahrain in March 2011, in light of which the declaration sought to formalise a permanent joint army to be used in “defence” of the Gulf states (more on the perceived technicalities of the joint army later). The GCC’s physical presence and involvement in Bahrain in March 2011 through the deployment of its military arm, the PSF, highlights this aspect of regime preservation and reinforces this research’s argument that the Gulf monarchies have harnessed and made use of the collective authority of the GCC to protect their monarchical sovereignties and secure their domestic position and authoritarian rule during the Arab Spring.¹⁰⁹¹

The Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011 were perceived as extreme security threats by the GCC monarchs; with Saudi Arabia leading the way, the GCC decided to take bold

¹⁰⁹⁰ Al-Saadi (2011).

¹⁰⁹¹ Kamrava (2012).

measures in deploying its military arm into Bahrain on March 14 with the stated goal of maintaining order and protecting its borders. The PSF was commanded by Major General Mutlaq Bin Salem al-Azima, a Saudi national, and consisted of mostly Saudi troops: an estimated of 1,200 Saudi troops accompanied by an estimated 500 Emirati police.¹⁰⁹² The Kuwaiti government sent a naval force, largely by way of symbolic participation in the GCC military intervention in Bahrain.¹⁰⁹³ The Saudi government announced that the GCC Council of Ministers had responded to a call for help from its Bahraini neighbour.¹⁰⁹⁴ It was the first time the GCC has utilised collective military action to help maintain domestic order in a member state. GCC officials pointed out that the objectives of the military arm had been extended to include the protection of all member states from external *and* internal threats; thus legitimising the use of the PSF in Bahrain.

In a meeting with the commander and senior officers of the PSF, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, commended the GCC leaders for sending troops to protect Bahrain from harm. He further stated: "Your presence is a support and gives us strength."¹⁰⁹⁵ The decision behind unleashing the PSF to Bahrain was made mainly by the Saudi and Bahraini leaderships; however, all six Gulf monarchs approved it. According to Major al-Azima, "any intervention by the force must include participation from all GCC member states."¹⁰⁹⁶ According to political analysts and news sources, however, three of the six member states, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman, had concerns in sending their

¹⁰⁹² *Al-Arabiya*. (2011). GCC troops dispatched to Bahrain to maintain order.

¹⁰⁹³ Katzman (2016).

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. (2011). Peninsula Shield enter Bahrain to maintain order.

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Global Arab Network*. (n.d.). GCC: Bahrain King commends Peninsula Shield forces.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. (2011). A talk with peninsula shield force commander Mutlaq bin Salem Al Azima.

own troops as part of the PSF into Bahraini territory: they were wary of Saudi dominance in the domestic affairs of fellow GCC member states.¹⁰⁹⁷ The Kuwaiti government refrained from sending ground troops into Bahrain as part of the PSF mission; parliament raised the issue with the prime minister, Sunni Salafi parliament members denouncing the government's decision not to send troops to Bahrain. Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Shi'a had staged a rally to thank their government for its reservations as to sending troops to "help the Bahraini government repress the Bahraini people".¹⁰⁹⁸ The governments of Oman and Qatar had both fully backed the Al-Khalifa regime in Bahrain in its confrontation with civil unrest; however, neither government had sent forces to join the collaborative efforts of the PSF.¹⁰⁹⁹

PSF operations were limited to assisting the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF) in protecting and securing vital locations in the country; they were stationed in certain areas to protect the Bahraini borders.¹¹⁰⁰ As the Bahraini Commission¹¹⁰¹ later confirmed, the PSF did not participate in any operations that involved confrontations with Bahraini civilians, or engage in repressing or controlling demonstrators. The report further stated that it did not find any evidence of human rights violations committed by the PSF.¹¹⁰² The GCC force withdrew from Bahrain in June 2011 after the Bahraini government lifted the state of emergency that had been imposed in March 2011; however, some UAE police

¹⁰⁹⁷ Roberts, D. (2012) Gulf Disunion. *Foreign Policy*.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *Al-Arabiya*. (2011). Kuwait MPs to quiz premier over Bahrain troops.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁰ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. (2011). A talk with peninsula shield force commander Mutlaq bin Salem Al Azima.

¹¹⁰¹ Bassiouni (2011).

¹¹⁰² *Global Security*. (2016). Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC].

and possibly other GCC security forces remained.¹¹⁰³ Gulf as well as regional and international media began debating the future role of the PSF as a legitimate security apparatus and whether its purpose was to protect the Gulf population from harm or to protect the sovereignty and authority of the Gulf monarchs. Regardless of the future role of the PSF, its deployment to Bahrain in March 2011 marked a new era of military and political alliance in the Gulf region.

Accordingly, the main motive behind the show of force and the means of intervention by the PSF in Bahrain was to send a strong message, in the context of recent developments in the Arab Spring, to any internal or external opposition movement willing to rise against the Gulf governments. Saudi Arabia's part in using force in face of demands for political reform in Bahrain also signalled a sense of determination to the world that the Saudi leadership intends to protect the Bahraini monarchy, and by implication its own domestic, regional, and global position. It portrays a clear method of GCC intervention in using military means to protect a member state from internal turmoil, and signals its future involvement in any attempt at delegitimising the monarchies of any of the other GCC member states.

The GCC monarchies further attempted to collaborate in a defence scheme by a reassessment of the GCC Internal Security Agreement. The Agreement was first proposed in 1982 by the Saudi monarchy, and remained under discussion until all GCC members accepted its terms. Kuwait was the last GCC member to sign the pact, in November 2012. The idea of the internal security pact was introduced in February 1982 at the GCC's first Ministerial Council meeting. An incident that occurred a couple of

¹¹⁰³ Katzman, K. (2015). Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy. *CRS Report for Congress*.

months prior had prompted the meeting to be held in Bahrain, where a group of terrorists, allegedly trained by Iran, had attempted to assassinate Bahraini officials.¹¹⁰⁴ It was thus within the context of regional instability that the GCC Interior Ministers met to discuss a comprehensive internal security agreement in 1982.¹¹⁰⁵ The Bahraini incident led to the Saudi initiative of a collective security force, and more importantly, to consensus on the principle of collective security. The GCC states began to reiterate the view that stressed “the region’s security and stability is a collective responsibility that falls on all GCC countries” and that “any aggression against any GCC member is an aggression against all GCC members.”¹¹⁰⁶ Evidently, the incident prompted the Gulf states to sign bilateral agreements; Saudi Arabia signed individual pacts with Bahrain, Oman and the UAE within the year. Meanwhile, discussions on collaborative internal security began among GCC officials, and the first draft of a multilateral security agreement was reviewed at the GCC Summit on November 17, 1982.

Kuwait was the only GCC country that refused to sign the multilateral security agreement, mainly due to its concern over the domestic political implications and the fear that the pact would threaten its democratic traditions. The Kuwaiti government was wary of Saudi Arabia’s conservative methods and feared Saudi dominance would impinge on the political liberties of Kuwaiti society. The most salient objection to the pact was to Article 12 of the draft agreement that stated:

¹¹⁰⁴ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 33.

¹¹⁰⁵ Kechichian, J. (2014). The Gulf Security Pact: Another GCC dilemma. *Al Jazeera*.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ramazani and Kechichian (1988), 35.

*Pursuit patrols belonging to any of the member countries have no right to cross the border of a neighbouring country, except for a distance not to exceed 20Km in order to arrest those being pursued. Those pursued ... are to be handed over to the nearest post belonging to the country in whose territory the chase began, if they were arrested within the said distance.*¹¹⁰⁷

The intrusion of other GCC states' security forces into Kuwaiti territory in an attempt to pursue suspected criminals was the main point of contradiction with Kuwait's constitution. The Kuwaiti government was not willing to risk a rise in tensions with its parliament; hence, the Kuwaiti Interior Minister at the time declared that his government would not sign the security pact unless it was amended to coincide with the nation's constitution. The GCC Interior Ministers revisited the security pact in 1994 with various amendments; however, Kuwait continued to refuse to ratify, stating that many of its articles "ran against its Constitution and threatened the political rights of its citizens".¹¹⁰⁸

However, the Arab Spring had prompted the Kuwaiti government to reassess its position. "[I]n a surprising change of heart, Kuwait's Interior Minister, Sheikh Ahmed Al Hammood, has declared his support for the pact and said that GCC Interior Ministers had reasonable basis and strategic reasons to enhance cooperation through this pact to face current challenges in the region and ensure stability."¹¹⁰⁹ According to Al Hammood, "GCC states must find ways to combat threats like terrorism, drug smuggling and other organised crimes as well as cyber and economic crimes that are raising their

¹¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Gulf In the Media*. (2012). Gulf security pact seen curbing freedom of expression.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

head in the region.”¹¹¹⁰ In November 13, 2012, the interior ministers of the six members of the GCC signed an amended version of the Internal Security Agreement in Riyadh, aimed at reinforcing security cooperation and coordination between the GCC member countries.¹¹¹¹ The overall goal of the agreement is to preserve the security and stability of the GCC states through information-sharing and collective action.¹¹¹² The GCC Secretary-General, Abdulatif Al-Zayani, stated “the security pact will empower each GCC country to take legal action, based on its own legislation against citizens of residents or organised groups that are linked to crime, terrorism or dissension.”¹¹¹³ He further stated that the political situation in the region required the GCC states to respond swiftly and take appropriate preventative measures to confront potential threats to their security and stability.

Although the Kuwaiti government reassured the public that the amended version no longer conflicted with the Kuwaiti constitution, “the swift signing of the agreement along with the secrecy surrounding its provisions stirred a heated debate in Kuwait, with some warning that the country is falling in line with the rest of the Gulf on issues of internal security and domestic politics.”¹¹¹⁴ The internal security pact has six chapters and 45 articles and the draft was leaked by an online Kuwaiti newspaper, *Al Sabr*,¹¹¹⁵ triggering discussions on social media sites, news outlets, and among members of the Kuwaiti

¹¹¹⁰ *Chainsoff's Blog*. (2012.). Kuwait decides to ratify the GCC security agreement.

¹¹¹¹ *Arab News*. (2012). GCC ministers sign security pact.

¹¹¹² Alsayed, W. (2013). Bridging the Gulf: Where Kuwait stands on the Gulf Union. *Al-Arabiya*.

¹¹¹³ *Arab News*. (2012). GCC ministers sign security pact.

¹¹¹⁴ Alsayed, W. (2013). Bridging the Gulf: Where Kuwait stands on the Gulf Union. *Al-Arabiya*.

¹¹¹⁵ *Al-Sabr Electronic Newspaper*. (Arabic).

parliament.¹¹¹⁶ The Kuwaiti public were concerned about the vague wording of the agreement and the perceived threat that it would impinge on their constitution. Articles 1 and 14 of the agreement, for example, contradict each other, where the first ensures that countries execute the agreement in accordance to each country's laws and constitutions, while the latter awards governments full powers to execute the agreement.¹¹¹⁷ The question arises, how can the government execute the agreement when it is unconstitutional? Meanwhile, Article 2 states that member states must take measures against nationals or expatriates who intervene in what are considered internal matters of a fellow member state and take actions against them, without specifying what kind of measures, the definition of internal matters, or what kind of actions are to be taken.¹¹¹⁸

Furthermore, Article 3 of the GCC draft security agreement completely conflicted with Articles 36 and 37 of the Kuwaiti constitution which guarantee freedom of expression and the freedom of the press. It states: "[S]ignatories must take legal action ... against the intervention of citizens or residents in the internal affairs of any of the other States parties."¹¹¹⁹ Articles 14 and 15 of the agreement also allow the "emergency services", including police, of one member state to cross the borders of another member up to an agreed limit, leading to the violation of Article 1 of the Kuwaiti constitution that ensures the principle of national sovereignty.¹¹²⁰ Another violation of the Kuwaiti

¹¹¹⁶ *Gulf In the Media*. (2012). Gulf security pact seen curbing freedom of expression.

¹¹¹⁷ Draft GCC Internal Security Agreement in Arabic taken from blogger: *Project Nation*. (2014). 8 Reasons for Kuwait to reject the GCC Security Agreement. [Blog].

¹¹¹⁸ *Chainsoff's Blog*. (2012.). Kuwait decides to ratify the GCC security agreement.

¹¹¹⁹ *Project Nation*. (2014). 8 Reasons for Kuwait to reject the GCC Security Agreement. [Blog].

¹¹²⁰ *Ibid*.

constitution comes in Article 16 of the agreement, where it states that “signatories are required to extradite any persons within its territory accused or convicted by the authorities of any other signatory”.¹¹²¹ Article 46 of the Kuwaiti constitution prohibits the extradition of political refugees.¹¹²²

Other articles within the GCC draft agreement further permit the interference of member states in each other’s domestic affairs: Article 4 allows for member states to share the personal police and state security records of their citizens and residents upon the request of any signatory state; and Article 11 allows for the presence of one member’s officials at the stage of collecting evidence of crimes that occur in another member’s territory and are relevant to its security. Fahad Al Shelaimi, the head of the Gulf Forum for Security and Safety, told news sources that Kuwait had got two articles removed from the draft agreement before it agreed to sign.¹¹²³ One of the articles referred to the handing over of nationals to neighbouring GCC states, and the second article pertained to allowing public security forces of a member state to enter another state.¹¹²⁴ According to former Kuwaiti MP, Adel Al-Sar’awi, an article was also added following the Bahraini demonstrations during the Arab Spring. Article 10 states: “States Parties, collectively or bilaterally, [shall] provide support and assistance in case of a request by any State Party, in order to meet security disturbances and disasters.”¹¹²⁵ He claims that when the Bahraini government requested assistance in an “internal” matter during the Arab Spring, Kuwait

¹¹²¹ Ibid.

¹¹²² The Kuwaiti Constitution

¹¹²³ *Gulf In the Media*. (2012). Gulf security pact seen curbing freedom of expression.

¹¹²⁴ *Chainsoff’s Blog*. (2012.). Kuwait decides to ratify the GCC security agreement.

¹¹²⁵ *Project Nation*. (2014). 8 Reasons for Kuwait to reject the GCC Security Agreement. [Blog].

declined to send its troops, citing the GCC defence agreement as being limited to “external” threats.¹¹²⁶

Although the Kuwaiti Interior Minister, as well as the Emir himself, signed the GCC Internal Security Agreement in 2012, it has yet to be ratified. Under the Kuwaiti constitution, the ratification of such an agreement needs the approval of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, which is divided over the security pact. The supporters of the pact “value the protection it offers in a region plagued by revolt”.¹¹²⁷ Meanwhile, opponents of the pact within parliament are concerned about the ambiguity of many of the articles (discussed above) as well as the compatibility of the pact with the Kuwaiti constitution. A main concern was the authorisation of states to intervene militarily to assist GCC governments in quelling internal unrest, and thus increase the chance of Kuwait becoming a unified GCC police state.¹¹²⁸ During the Arab Spring demonstrations in Kuwait in 2012, rumours had surfaced that the PSF might enter Kuwait to maintain stability.¹¹²⁹

The Foreign Affairs Committee within parliament had already advised against the ratification of the agreement in April 2011; former MP, Hamdan Al-Azmi, was on the committee that rejected the ratification. He stated:

The agreement cannot be accepted under any circumstances. There is a need for pressure from the parliament to explain some of its articles, particularly the

¹¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹¹²⁷ *Leiden Islam Blog*. (2014). Unrest in the region: Kuwait’s security debate in the light of the Arab Spring and the rise of IS. Universiteit Leiden.

¹¹²⁸ Kechichian, J. (2014). The Gulf Security Pact: Another GCC dilemma. *Al Jazeera*.

¹¹²⁹ Alsayed, W. (2013). Controversy after Kuwait sign GCC security pact. *IISS Voices*

*extradition of suspects and the definition of crime. There is a need for popular pressure to make sure the agreement is not endorsed. We cannot please some countries at the expense of Kuwait and its interest.*¹¹³⁰

The debate carried on in the Kuwaiti media; the majority of the citizen population was against the pact. A human rights activist in Kuwait stated that the pact would undermine the dignity of the Kuwaiti people: “It is sad that while the GCC states are supporting uprisings in other Arab countries, they are talking of curbing freedoms and arresting their own people.”¹¹³¹ Another statement by a Kuwaiti blogger refers to the ambiguity of the pact:

*The security pact...seemed to negate sovereignty of the signatures. More so, the pact does not take into account the varying degrees of freedom of expression and press within the differing Gulf countries.*¹¹³²

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti government continued to reject these allegations; Kuwait’s Foreign Minister, Sheikh Sabah Al Khalid stated: “Article One of the GCC security agreement does not clash with the Kuwaiti constitution, and there is no way that we endorse any law or decision that is against our constitution.”¹¹³³

However, even an international human rights organisation advised against Kuwait’s ratification of the agreement, citing articles in the agreement that go against human rights. HRW issued a statement specifying how the GCC security pact violates articles under the International Covenant on Civil and Politics Rights (ICCPR). Article 17 of the

¹¹³⁰ Toumi, H. (2014). Kuwait parliamentary committee rejects GCC security pact. *Gulf News*.

¹¹³¹ *Chainsoff’s Blog*. (2012.). Kuwait decides to ratify the GCC security agreement.

¹¹³² *Project Nation*. (2014). 8 Reasons for Kuwait to reject the GCC Security Agreement. [Blog].

¹¹³³ Toumi, H. (2014). GCC security pact may be referred to constitutional court. *Gulf News*.

ICCPR states: “[N]o one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.”¹¹³⁴ However:

*The security pact’s obligation for GCC countries to share private information about private citizens and residents without stating a legal basis, without a defined legal process to safeguard the right to privacy, and under the unchecked discretion of interior ministers appears to constitute “arbitrary interference” by authorities into the privacy rights of Gulf citizens and residents.*¹¹³⁵

An official in HRW, Joe Stork, further stated: “The security agreement gives Gulf government another legal pretext to stamp out dissent. Citizens and residents of the Gulf should note that their governments have agreed to share personal information at the whim of an interior minister.”¹¹³⁶

The GCC Internal Security Agreement was scheduled to be ratified by the Kuwaiti parliament in June 2014. However, due to the divisions in Kuwaiti society, the National Assembly postponed the vote for its ratification.¹¹³⁷ Lawmakers insisted that several of the provisions were missing clear definitions of what constituted political crimes or how “internal unrest” or “dissent” may be understood in various capitals as decision-makers mobilised their security forces to take action. Joseph Kechichian, a Gulf specialist, claims that these objections (by Kuwaiti parliamentarians) were also advanced “on the grounds that the GCC’s 2011 intervention in Bahrain was “unconstitutional” from a Kuwaiti

¹¹³⁴ *Human Rights Watch*. (2014). GCC: Joint Security Agreement Imperils Rights.

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹³⁷ Kholaf, D. (2014). Kuwait on alert over ISIL territorial gains in Iraq. *Middle East Eye*.

perspective, even if catastrophic developments on the ground necessitated GCC involvement there.”¹¹³⁸ Hence, lawmakers instead called for the preparation of a comprehensive legal study of the agreement and decided to address the vote in the next parliamentary term.

Ultimately, the Arab Spring demonstrations represented a crucial motivation for the Kuwait government to sign the security pact. The GCC internal security strategy is based on the pre-emptive measures that can be taken against hostile forces that seek to mobilise against member regimes, and securing GCC borders from smuggling activities. In the absence of effective political and military cooperation within the GCC, a collective domestic strategy of dealing with internal security issues has emerged, linking their interests in preserving their regimes with the political security of fellow member states. Hence, with the advent of the Arab Spring demonstrations, the GCC states have had to exert further efforts in unifying their internal security cooperation, leading to the signing of the GCC Internal Security Pact. The Kuwaiti leadership’s acquiescence and final signing of the pact after 20 years indicates a desperate attempt to maintain the status quo, manoeuvring its way around the Kuwaiti constitution and disregarding the political aspirations of the Kuwaiti people. The Kuwaiti parliament has yet to ratify the agreement; however, many political analysts have indicated the recent developments in the Gulf will influence its stance on the security pact. With the threat of Islamic State (IS) on its border, the Kuwaiti parliament might not be able to resist government pressure to ratify

¹¹³⁸ Kechichian, J. (2014). The Gulf Security Pact: Another GCC dilemma. *Al Jazeera*.

the agreement – the government is continuously pushing for closer GCC internal security cooperation as part of a collaborative defence scheme.¹¹³⁹

Furthermore, according to Saudi academic Madhawi Al-Rasheed, the signing of the Internal Security Pact by all six member states has “ushered a new era of *Pax Saudiana* across the Gulf”.¹¹⁴⁰ She argues that the first casualties of this controversial agreement are Kuwaiti activists; since January 2015, Al-Rasheed points out, at least three Kuwaiti opposition figures, social media activists and heads of political movements have been detained at the request of the Saudi authorities (the above section mentions a few of those detained).

*Meant to enhance security for economic development and stability of GCC countries, the pact has now tuned into creating cross-border controls, evacuating the Arab Gulf dissent and eliminating safe havens for dissidents of one country in another one.*¹¹⁴¹

She gives the example of Mohammed Al-Ajmi, a famous Twitter activist known as Abu Asm, who was detained simply because he tweeted a statement that was interpreted as disrespectful of the late Saudi King, Abdullah ibn Abdul-Aziz. Al-Rasheed states: “It is evident now that criticising Saudi Arabia is taboo, the violation of which definitely leads to perhaps several years in prison.”¹¹⁴² She claims that the pact is another attempt to silence dissent among the Gulf countries, and that Saudi hegemony “comes with a heavy

¹¹³⁹ *Leiden Islam Blog*. (2014). Unrest in the region: Kuwait’s security debate in the light of the Arab Spring and the rise of IS. Universiteit Leiden.

¹¹⁴⁰ Al-Rasheed, M. (2015). Kuwaiti activists targeted under GCC security pact. *Al Monitor*.

¹¹⁴¹ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁴² *Ibid*.

burden, mainly silencing opposition and interfering in the freedoms in countries such as Kuwait, which is politically more vigorous and developed than ‘Big Brother, known in Arabic as Big Sister’”.¹¹⁴³ Al-Rasheed perceives the pact as a mechanism designed to monitor and punish political dissidents, which reflects this research’s argument in identifying it as a tactic under a broad GCC strategy for regime preservation. She further asserts that “the GCC itself may not move from cooperation to unification in the near future but it has certainly become yet another mechanism to silence peaceful and legitimate opposition across borders”.¹¹⁴⁴

In its attempt to further engage in a collaborative defence scheme, the GCC Supreme Council agreed on a joint military command and police force during the 34th GCC Summit that was held in Kuwait on December 10, 2013. The unified military and police force will be used in battling foreign and local “terrorists and extremists”, which may include citizens.¹¹⁴⁵ The decision was to be taken as “part of the steps and efforts aiming to reinforce the security and stability of the GCC countries and to establish a common military system to achieve collective security”.¹¹⁴⁶ The Minister of the National Guard, Prince Miteb Bin Abdullah, announced in the Saudi Press Agency reports: “There will be a unified command of around 100,000 members, God willing. I hope it will happen soon, and the National Guard is ready for anything that is asked of it.”¹¹⁴⁷ The Saudi Minister also stressed the need for unity among the Gulf’s monarchs to demonstrate power in the

¹¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁴⁵ *SUSRIS*. (2013).

¹¹⁴⁶ *RT News*. (2013). Joint Gulf military command to control 100,000 combat troops.

¹¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

region, claiming that the new force will boost security, defence, and the economy of the member states.

In April 2015, the GCC monarchies announced the establishment of the headquarters of the joint GCC police force in Abu Dhabi, where it will “work to coordinate efforts across the region, [and] share knowledge and information among other relevant security bodies”.¹¹⁴⁸ A joint GCC police force may change the course of political life in each of the Gulf states, especially since the main goal of the force is to secure the regimes against “terrorists”. The main question lies in how the GCC defines terrorism – this has proven to be vague and open to various interpretations under the law. The wide definition of terrorism allows Gulf governments to discredit government oppositions and authorise extreme police violence in the name of national security. Overall, Kuwait has resisted the interference of other Gulf monarchies in its domestic affairs since independence. However, the threat of the Arab Spring has somehow altered the government’s independent domestic policies and prompted increased cooperation efforts within the GCC.

V. Case Study Alternative Analysis

As this case study provides supporting evidence in favour of the hypothesis that Kuwait has utilised the GCC as a vehicle to preserve the Kuwaiti regime during the Arab Spring, it is important to discuss alternative explanations to events analysed in the case study. This research presents two alternative hypotheses (one was mentioned in the introduction) and puts forward supporting evidence to discredit these alternative

¹¹⁴⁸ *Al-Arabiya*. (2015). UAE endorses hosting HQ for joint GCC police force in Abu Dhabi.

explanations. The first alternative hypothesis would be that the Kuwaiti regime is subject to Saudi dominance and was forced by Saudi Arabia's determination to promote repression and to oppose democratic reforms within the Gulf region. It associates the 'GCC Strategy of Regime Preservation' with Saudi strategy to dominate the smaller GCC member states and establish the Arab Spring demonstrations as a common threat to their survival. The second alternative hypothesis would be that the Kuwaiti regime survived the Arab Spring due to its relatively liberal policies – that Kuwaiti citizens enjoyed certain freedoms and were not compelled to demand political rights. It also suggests that the Kuwaiti demonstrations were not a threat to the monarchy and did not induce the fear of regime change.

The Saudi leadership's motivation behind the proposal of a closer GCC union, expressed in the Riyadh Declaration at the 32nd GCC Summit in December 2011, is quite transparent in terms of the timing and the reason: Arab Spring demonstrations were spreading across the region and the leaderships of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen had fallen. The Saudi regime was thus wary of the impact of these events on its own population and began establishing a pre-emptive strategy with the aim of differentiating its rulership from fallen dictators and appeasing its citizens with various benefits. In its attempt to present the monarchical political structure as an acceptable (if not superior) means of governance and stabilise its own autocratic rule over its population, the Saudi leadership reached out to the remaining two monarchies in the region, Jordan and Morocco, and invited them to join their regional alliance, the GCC. Academic scholar Sylvia Colombo points out that the Saudis' main motivation behind this move was to

create a division between government structures in the region: monarchies versus republics.

The evidence supporting this theory lies in the Arab Spring demonstrations that occurred in Yemen in 2011, where because Yemen was a republic rather than a monarchy, the GCC monarchies were willing to remove President Saleh for the sake of regional stability. Had it been an Arab monarchy, like Morocco or Jordan, the GCC would have supported the rulers themselves and their monarchical system of rule. Colombo's interpretation of the GCC's overall reaction to Yemen's uprisings relies on the monarchy/republic dichotomy. Led by Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries were attempting to forge a new identity based on political affinity rather than just geographical proximity. Saudi Arabia's extended invitation to Jordan and Morocco to join the GCC was, therefore, an attempt to redefine the GCC as a 'monarchy club', rather than a mere regional organisation.¹¹⁴⁹ It was also a clear sign that Saudi Arabia was being proactive in reasserting its position of prominence and leadership within the region and, in a way, leading a "counter-revolution of the Arab Spring."¹¹⁵⁰

Hence, the Saudi leadership's motivation behind the Riyadh Declaration was to a certain degree to facilitate a plan of action among GCC members to prevent the Arab Spring impacting Gulf populations. However, the objectives and goals behind the Riyadh Declaration were not as simple as that. The ambiguous terms used in the document are quintessentially GCC, reflecting the organisation's persona – the GCC Charter itself is filled with ambiguity and open interpretations. This research asserts that the unspoken

¹¹⁴⁹ Colombo (2012), 9.

¹¹⁵⁰ Jones, T. (2011) *Counterrevolution in the Gulf*. United States Institute of Peace.

elements of the document signify the inability of the six member states to come to an agreement. If Saudi Arabia were able to dominate the other five members of the group, the Riyadh Declaration would have been a more solid plan of action with clearer goals. Also, the signing of the document by all six member states indicates a desire to address the Arab Spring threat as a group, and not led by a single member state.

This research has briefly presented the dynamics of the GCC organisation in Chapter One, where it asserts that the balance of power within the GCC is reliant on shared internal and external security threats, and the knowledge that if one monarchy falls, the rest will follow. Hence, Saudi Arabia's political legitimacy and indeed survival is aligned with the other five GCC monarchies. This thesis thus discredits the alternative hypothesis of Saudi dominance and labels the strategy as a 'GCC' strategy because it was agreed upon by all six members and applied by these individual monarchies within their own populations, the end result being the preservation of each regime.

The second alternative hypothesis would claim that the Kuwaiti regime's potential for survival was high due to its relatively liberal policies – in comparison to other Gulf citizens, Kuwaiti citizens enjoyed a higher degree of freedom in terms of political participation and in social/religious respects. However, this thesis argues that the survival of the Kuwaiti regime, along with the other three GCC monarchies that experienced street demonstrations, relied on the reaction of the GCC governments to the unrest. It argues that the GCC monarchies utilised shared tactics to preserve their regimes and dismiss demands for political reform. The Kuwaiti monarchy survived the Arab Spring because of these tactics, where it was able to prevent further demonstrations from occurring and appease the population. The liberal aspect of its policies does not fit into the equation

because of the comparison with other GCC members: Saudi Arabia, for example, with its strict domestic policies, also survived the Arab Spring. The political structures and domestic policies of the GCC monarchies are key factors in their ability to preserve their regimes; however, they do not fully explain how or why the GCC monarchies survived the Arab Spring.

Furthermore, this alternative hypothesis claims that the Kuwaiti demonstrations were not a threat to the monarchy and did not induce the fear of regime change. A mere 1% of the population participated in demonstrations, which one may argue does not constitute a real threat to the regime. This thesis refutes this argument by indicating in its case study the impact of these demonstrations on Kuwait's domestic policies. The government reacted to the demonstrations by utilising tactics, most of which were used for the first time in the history of Kuwait. The use of police violence and arrests was a feature of all three sets of demonstrations in Kuwait, whereas deploying a police force in full gear had been a rarity in the past. Restricting freedom of expression was a tactic utilised by previous leaderships in Kuwait; however, arresting Twitter participants over criticising neighbouring Gulf monarchies and sending them to prison was hitherto unknown. And finally, revocation of citizenship was never a policy utilised in Kuwait, especially for political reasons. All these new policies and reactions indicate the severity of the threat generated by the Arab Spring demonstrations in the eyes of the Kuwaiti leadership.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study highlights the events of the Arab Spring in Kuwait and links Kuwait's tumultuous political past with the impact of the Arab Spring and the role

of the GCC in its government's response. The case study represents an example of how the threat of the Arab Spring reinforced an already existing logic of unity among the GCC member states. The Kuwaiti leadership responded to its demonstrations by engaging in the three GCC tactics shared by fellow GCC member states. First, it attempted to enhance its legitimacy by providing financial incentives to its citizens. Second, the Kuwaiti government took steps to heighten its internal security by the use of tactics of mass arrest, violence towards protestors and curbing freedom of expression. And third, it collaborated in a defence scheme by signing the GCC Internal Security Agreement in November 2012. The utilisation of these tactics indicates that the Kuwaiti government was threatened by the Arab Spring, and feared the complete destruction of its regime structure. The Kuwaiti government's intentions in moving the GCC towards a closer union thus mark the intrusion of the GCC into its domestic politics and its willingness to override its citizens' constitutional freedoms in order to preserve its rule.

Overall, this research's analysis of its case study on Kuwait, the GCC and the Arab Spring verifies its hypothesis that the Gulf monarchies used their alliance, the GCC, as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring in 2011–2012. The utilisation of the GCC as a vehicle for regime preservation stems from the alliance's key objective of sustaining the sovereignty and legitimacy of all six Gulf monarchies. The case study proves that the Kuwaiti leadership shared tactics in common with the GCC in suppressing demonstrations during the Arab Spring in order to maintain its regime. It further observes that the coordination and emulation of policies among the GCC monarchies influenced Kuwait's domestic policies, especially through the heightening of its security precautions. The Kuwaiti government began to involve the GCC in its domestic policies through its

cooperation in various joint programmes, such as a GCC youth strategy and a GCC unified police and navy force. Finally, this case study proves that by utilising tactics under the broad GCC strategy for regime preservation, the Kuwaiti leadership allowed unprecedented GCC interference in its domestic affairs, and thus engaged the regional alliance as a vital participant in preserving its regime during the Arab Spring.

Conclusion

This research has presented a case study that examines how the threat of regime change during the Arab Spring prompted the Kuwaiti leadership to further engage with its regional alliance, the GCC, in order to survive. The case study has answered the central question of this research: what is the relationship between the Gulf monarchies and their regional organisation, the GCC, and how have the Gulf monarchies used the GCC as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring? In addressing this question, the research provides an analysis of how the Gulf monarchies utilised certain tactics under a broad GCC strategy for regime preservation during the Arab Spring. This strategy consists of three main tactics employed by the monarchies to prevent organised demonstrations and quell government opposition: *enhancing monarchical legitimacy*, *heightening internal security*, and *collaborating in a defence scheme*.

The Arab Spring motivated the Gulf leaderships to intensify cooperation efforts under their regional alliance, the GCC. However, a closer GCC union would compromise the sovereignty of the individual monarchies, and thus has yet to be accepted by all six member states. As such, the case study on Kuwait examined how an independent nation restructured its domestic policies to accommodate the interference of the GCC in order to preserve its regime and ultimately, survive the Arab Spring. The hypothesis of this research is that the Gulf monarchies utilised the GCC as a vehicle to preserve their regimes during the Arab Spring. The case study portrays how the Kuwaiti monarchy

allowed unprecedented interference in its domestic affairs by engaging in a closer union with other GCC member states.

The research provided an in-depth analysis of Kuwait's political history, presenting the trajectory of its parliamentary politics. In examining Kuwait's tumultuous political history, this research traces the foundation of the Arab Spring demonstrations back to the roots of Kuwaiti politics, highlighting the relationship between the Kuwaiti rulers and the ruled. In its analysis of the Kuwaiti constitution, it further depicts the basis of the people's demands during the Arab Spring. It has shown how the Kuwaiti leadership has utilised several mechanisms in suppressing demands for reform throughout its history, and argues that it has adopted a new mechanism for regime preservation by its closer alliance within the GCC during the Arab Spring. As a comparative analysis, this research also provided the details of the Arab Spring in three other Gulf monarchies: Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The demonstrations that occurred in these Gulf monarchies had similar outcomes – all three Gulf governments responded to people's demands for reform with a mix of violence and concessions. The Gulf monarchies engaged in collaborative efforts to sustain their regimes, and also applied similar tactics within their own borders under a broad GCC strategy for regime preservation. This research showcases the unity and mutual support of GCC member states at times of crisis, yet also indicates the suspicions that exist between individual members, especially with regard to the fear of Saudi domination shared by the smaller member states. Nevertheless, the threat of regime change has temporarily overshadowed the fear of Saudi domination, and has thus led the Gulf monarchies to engage their GCC organisation as a vital participant in preserving their regimes during the Arab Spring.

The practical and theoretical implications of the findings from the Kuwait case study rely on two main outcomes: first, in utilising various tactics, the Kuwaiti leadership managed to quell demonstrations and squash the opposition's attempt to rally the people against the government. A second outcome is the indication that the GCC monarchies are a dynamic and pragmatic group who will continue to change their domestic and international policies to fit their survival needs. By utilising certain tactics, all four of the affected GCC leaderships have survived the Arab Spring; however, they have not necessarily strengthened their legitimacy among their respective populations. Several of the tactics outlined in the GCC Strategy of Regime Preservation are considered as ongoing policies in these GCC states (such as financial incentives and police violence); however, they are not necessarily considered sustainable. Nevertheless, the short-term outcome of these tactics has led to the end result of regime preservation. A key implication of the findings from this research is thus that the GCC monarchies will continue to apply various tactics, old and new, and utilise the GCC alliance as a key support system with the goal of preserving their regimes.

Apart from the details provided in the Kuwaiti case study surrounding the events that occurred in Kuwait during the Arab Spring in 2011–2012, the main contribution that this thesis provides to current knowledge is the role of the GCC alliance in the survival of the GCC monarchies during the Arab Spring and the survival tactics highlighted within the GCC Strategy of Regime Preservation. A unique aspect of the case study is the interference of a regional alliance in the domestic policies of a state; it has indicated that the Arab Spring strengthened GCC unity and prompted the Gulf governments to allow the interference of fellow GCC members in their domestic affairs. It is important to note

that an independent country such as Kuwait, notorious for its neutral foreign policies and relatively liberal constitution, has opened up to the notion of a GCC union that may eliminate its neutrality and liberal policies. The research has proved that the threat of regime change pushed the Kuwaiti government into unprecedented GCC interaction – only recently it agreed to send 15 jets to support Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen, in 2015.¹¹⁵¹ The dimension of analysing the role of a regional alliance in the survival of a regime during threatening circumstances may be applied in future research that focuses on the GCC. Does a strengthened GCC union lead to less independent domestic policies for the member states? Will future internal and external threats of to the GCC states continue to spark what Fred Lawson described as “the revival of multilateralism”?¹¹⁵² Or will the GCC states continue to limit cooperation in order to secure their individual domestic policies?

Another key contribution to the literature is the identification of the various survival tactics utilised by regimes while facing internal challenges. The importance of the such tactics may be imported into studies that aim to explain the survival of other authoritarian regimes around the world in future comparative studies. This research presented the tactics that were highlighted in the Riyadh Declaration during the GCC summit in December 2011, and provided evidence of the application of these tactics by the Kuwaiti monarchy in its case study. Among these tactics was the coordination and emulation of policies among the GCC states, specifically, the GCC Youth Program and the GCC Joint Police and Navy Force. In April 2015, the GCC monarchies announced the establishment

¹¹⁵¹ *Al-Arabiya*. (2015). UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordon deploy warplanes against Houthis.

¹¹⁵² Lawson (1999), 18.

of the headquarters of the joint GCC police force in Abu Dhabi, where it will “work to coordinate efforts across the region, [and] share knowledge and information among other relevant security bodies”.¹¹⁵³

This research provides an opening for future research to explore the impact of the GCC organisation on the political trajectories of the Gulf monarchies, and the other way round. The distinctive nature of political leadership as between each of the Gulf monarchies is an important consideration when it comes to GCC cooperation efforts, and this research indicates that the Gulf monarchies put aside these differences due to the threat of regime change during the Arab Spring. As the Arab Spring came to an end, GCC member interactions fluctuated between an increase in cooperation efforts and an increase in rivalries. The opening of the joint GCC police force in Abu Dhabi was a step taken after the end of an eight-month rift between Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, and fellow GCC member Qatar, over Qatar’s support for Islamic groups in the region.¹¹⁵⁴ The three Gulf monarchies withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar and accused it of breaching the GCC’s security agreement by lending its support to the Muslim Brotherhood.¹¹⁵⁵ The feud ended with the return of the GCC ambassadors and the continuing of GCC cooperation efforts in the security and defence field. The ability of the GCC member states to reconcile their differences and resolve their disagreements showcases the resilience of the organisation. A main and final message that resonates within this research is that under the unity of the GCC, the Gulf monarchies represent a

¹¹⁵³ *Al-Arabiya*. (2015). UAE Endorses Hosting HQ for Joint GCC Police Force in Abu Dhabi.

¹¹⁵⁴ *Reuters*. (2014). Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain End Rift with Qatar, Return Ambassadors.

¹¹⁵⁵ Kholaf, D. (2014). Will the GCC survive Qatar-Saudi rivalry? *Al Jazeera*.

dynamic and effective group whose dynasties will continue to rule for a long time to come.

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Appendix

I. The Gulf Region: Geography

The ‘Persian Gulf’ refers to the body of water that lies between Iran to the east and the Arabian Peninsula to the west.¹¹⁵⁶ The current Gulf monarchies are the six states surrounding the Persian Gulf, which is an extension of the Arabian Sea, reaching all the way past the Gulf of Oman and through the Strait of Hormuz. They are: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. The six Gulf monarchies are situated on the southwest peninsula of Asia, located between West Africa and Iran, and to the southeast of the Levant. The water boundaries include the Red Sea, extending from the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba to Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden, separating Arabia from Africa. The southern peninsula has a coastline of some 2,000 km with the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. To the east, the Gulf (900 km) starts from the mouth of the Euphrates River to the Strait of Hormuz (a narrow and strategically important waterway through which most of the region’s oil must pass)¹¹⁵⁷ separating the peninsula from Asia proper. Due to this maritime delineation, the

¹¹⁵⁶ Peck, M. C. (1997). *Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. 76.

¹¹⁵⁷ Peterson, J. (2007). *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy*. London: Saqi Publishing. 32.

collective area of the Gulf region has boundaries with only three states: Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen.¹¹⁵⁸

Figure 2: Map of Persian Gulf Region¹¹⁵⁹



With an area of 2,000,000 square kilometres, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is geographically the largest country in the Gulf region.¹¹⁶⁰ The Kingdom occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula, with the Persian Gulf to the east, the Indian Ocean to the south and the Red Sea to the West. It is the only Gulf state to have land boundaries with every other Gulf state: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. The Kingdom also has land boundaries with Jordan and Iraq in the north and with Yemen in

¹¹⁵⁸ Peterson (1988), 3.

¹¹⁵⁹ *Generational Dynamics*. (n.d.). Map of Gulf Region.

¹¹⁶⁰ Amin, S. H. (1984). *Political and Strategic Issues in the Persian-Arabian Gulf*. Glasgow: Royston. 7.

the south. It is also the only Gulf state to extend from the Gulf to the Red Sea. Due to the geographical narrowness of the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia is in close proximity to several West African and Maghreb states, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. Oman is situated on the southeastern border of the Peninsula with access to both the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, distinguishing it from the rest of the Gulf states. Its territory includes the Musandam Peninsula, a finger of land that protrudes into the Strait of Hormuz. It is separated from Iran by the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman, making it the closest to the southwest Asian countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan. In fact, the distance from Muscat to Karachi is smaller than the distance from Kuwait to Riyadh.¹¹⁶¹

Kuwait is a flat, triangular area on the northwest corner of the Gulf, with an area of 17,800 square kilometres; Iraq lies to its north, Saudi Arabia to its southwest, and a Neutral Zone was established to its south. The Gulf sea lanes serve as a highway for Kuwaiti trade with neighbouring countries. At the mouth of the Gulf, the strategically important islands of Warba and Bubiyan are under its jurisdiction.¹¹⁶² These islands are significant due to their location at the tip of the Persian Gulf – the only viable access to the Shatt Al-Arab¹¹⁶³ for their neighbouring country, Iraq. Bahrain is the only island state of the Gulf region; situated midway along the Persian Gulf it comprises of an archipelago of thirty-five small islands, approximately 24 km off the east coast of Saudi Arabia. The largest island is Bahrain itself, with its capital Manama; the second largest island, Muharraq, is northeast of Manama and linked to the main island by three causeways.

¹¹⁶¹ Peterson (1988), 8.

¹¹⁶² Amin (1984), 9.

¹¹⁶³ The southern end of the river constitutes the border between Iraq and Iran down to the mouth of the river as it discharges into the Persian Gulf.

Qatar occupies the Peninsula of Qatar on the west coast of the Gulf; it has an area of about 10,000 km². It has a 27 km border with Saudi Arabia and a short frontier with the UAE, and a coastline that parallels the Iranian coast on its north side.¹¹⁶⁴ The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates situated in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula on the Persian Gulf. The total area of the UAE is around 82,600 km². It is surrounded by four states: Oman lies to its east, Saudi Arabia to its south, Qatar to its west and Iran to its north. The Emirates comprise Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain; with Abu Dhabi as the nation's capital. Collectively, the six GCC states encompass an area of almost 2.5 million km², exceeding the landmass of both Iraq and Iran.

¹¹⁶⁴ Peterson (1988), 8.

Timeline: The Kuwaiti Arab Spring (2010–2012)

Dec. 6, 2010: GCC 31st Annual Summit in the UAE.

Dec. 8, 2010: Pro-democracy gathering at a MP's private residence.

Dec. 2010: Emir of Kuwait grants all Kuwaiti citizens 1,000 KD and a free food grant for one entire year to commemorate the 20th anniversary of liberation from Iran and the 50th anniversary of independence from the British.

Jan. 5, 2011: Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser, survives a vote of no confidence.

Feb. 19, 2011: First set of demonstrations by the Bidoon calling for citizenship rights.

March 11, 2011: Bidoon demonstration.

March 14, 2011: GCC Peninsula Shield enters Bahrain.

June 3, 2011: Around 500 Kuwaiti citizens demonstrate at Erada Square calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister.

Sept. 2011: Corruption scandal leaked.

Sept. 21-23, 2011: Demonstrations demanding removal of prime minister.

Nov. 16, 2011: Storming of Parliament building, dubbed the “Black Day” by the Emir.

Dec. 4, 2011: Prime minister resigns and Emir dissolves Parliament.

Dec. 25, 2011: GCC 32nd Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Riyadh Declaration is issued, where the Saudi monarch suggests moving the GCC from a state of cooperation to one of union.

Feb. 2, 2012: Parliamentary elections result in a pro-opposition Assembly.

June 20, 2012: Kuwait's Constitutional Court rules that the December 2011 suspension of Parliament by the Emir was not conducted in accordance with the constitution on the grounds that a new cabinet had not been sworn in before the suspension was ordered. Hence, the Court moves to dissolve the elected February 2012 Parliament and reinstate the May 2009 Assembly (which consisted of a majority of pro-government members).¹¹⁶⁵

June 26, 2012: Thousands rally for pro-democratic reforms.

Aug. 9, 2012: The government refers the Electoral Law to the Constitutional Court.

Sept. 24, 2012: Thousands rally at Erada Square demanding democratic reform.

Sept. 25, 2012: The Constitutional Court rejects the government's request to revise the Electoral Law – a rare example of the court overruling the Emir's wishes.¹¹⁶⁶

Oct. 15, 2012: Demonstrations resulting in clash between youth and police lead to a number of arrests.

Oct. 19, 2012: The Emir sets a new election date of December 1, 2012, and simultaneously issues an Emiri decree amending the electoral constituency law to limit voters to the choice of one candidate, in contrast to the previous law of four candidates per district.¹¹⁶⁷ This is when Mussalam Al-Barrak makes his speech.

Oct. 21, 2012: Kuwait experiences its largest demonstration at Erada Square, dubbed the "March of Dignity", attended by an estimated 100,000–200,000 citizens.¹¹⁶⁸

Oct. 31, 2012: Around 200 of Al-Barrak's supporters gather outside the Central Prison where he was held, calling for his release.¹¹⁶⁹

Nov. 4, 2012: Demonstrations in Mishref lead to police violence.

¹¹⁶⁵ Katzman (2016).

¹¹⁶⁶ Toumi, H. (2012). Kuwait court upholds 2006 electoral law. *Gulf News*.

¹¹⁶⁷ Katzman (2016).

¹¹⁶⁸ Zaaiteer, H. (2012). Did Kuwait's Big Protest Reveal A Genuine Threat to the Regime? *Al-Monitor*.

¹¹⁶⁹ *Human Rights Watch*. (2012). Kuwait: Lift Protest Ban.

Nov. 11, 2012: Pro-democracy demonstration held in Erada Square commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Kuwaiti constitution.

Nov. 13, 2012: The GCC Internal Security Agreement is signed by all six member states.

Nov. 30, 2012: Tens of thousands demonstrate calling for boycott of elections.

Dec. 1, 2012: Parliamentary elections result in a pro-government majority due to the opposition boycott.

Dec. 4-6, 2012: Protests against new Assembly around Kuwait city; police violence.

Dec. 8, 2012: Marches throughout Kuwait city calling for dissolution of the new Assembly.

Dec. 15, 2012: Sit-in at Erada Square calling for the dissolution of the new Assembly.

Dec. 25, 2012: GCC 33rd Summit in Bahrain; the Sakhir Declaration is issued.

June 16, 2013: the Constitutional Court rules that the Emir's decree of a one candidate vote, reduced from four, was indeed constitutional, yet, it further ordered the Assembly to be dissolved on the basis of improper technicalities in the election decree.¹¹⁷⁰

July 27, 2013: Parliamentary elections result is a majority of pro-government MPs.

Dec. 11, 2013: GCC 34th Summit in Kuwait.

¹¹⁷⁰ Katzman (2016).